

A STORY OF ASYLUM

JOHN WASHINGTON

LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S LEFT

ELIAS RODRIQUES

THE **Nation.**

MAY 4/11, 2020



**WHILE YOUR
ATTENTION WAS
ELSEWHERE**

**The earth remains
in critical condition**

**The Extinction
Crisis Comes
Home to
San Francisco**

JIMMY TOBIAS

Earth Day Live(s)

BILL McKIBBEN

**Organizing
on the Coasts
Won't Save
the Planet**

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YOUNGE** —Hosted by **Jon Wiener**

Letters

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The Truth About Lies

Susie Linfield warns us against “telling lies” [Letters, April 6], then proceeds to demonstrate her commitment to exactly that by claiming, falsely, that I have manufactured “entirely fictitious claims.”

Linfield is referring to her central charge in the chapter on me in her book *The Lions’ Den*: that I invented a fairy tale about the 1976 United Nations Security Council Resolution, which very explicitly called for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict along the internationally recognized borders, with guarantees for “the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of all states in the area,” including Israel and the new Palestinian state.

In fact, I discussed this resolution accurately, quoting its crucial words and pointing out that it was supported by Egypt, Syria, and Jordan; rejected by Israel; and vetoed by the United States, while the Palestine Liberation Organization condemned “the tyranny of the veto.” I also quoted Israel’s Ambassador to the UN (later president) Chaim Herzog, who claimed that the Palestinians not only backed the resolution but even “prepared” it, therefore rendering it unacceptable. Not true, but a useful illustration of how extreme was Israel’s concern that a two-state solution might be endorsed by the UN. The country’s formal reaction was presented by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: Israel must “vehemently oppose any tendency to establish a third state in the area between it and Jordan.” See my books *Towards a New Cold War*, pages 267 and 461, and *Fateful Triangle*, pages 67 and 68. Linfield cites both, thus demonstrating that her charge arises not out of simple ignorance but by conscious fabrication.

The same books review many other occasions in the 1970s when Israel

rejected opportunities for a diplomatic settlement, all evaded by Linfield, who prefers such gambits as repeated laments that “[Chomsky] cites himself as the source”—meaning that I gave a page reference in the same book for explicit statements instead of merely repeating them.

There is no point wasting space on Linfield’s litany of deceit and misrepresentation, though I’ll be happy to respond to specific queries. What is important to recognize is that in the early stages of the occupation, in the ’70s, Israel made a fateful decision to choose expansion over security.

That decision had far-reaching consequences for the Palestinians and more broadly, including for Israel itself. In the ’70s, Israel was still highly admired, even benefiting from accolades accorded to no other state. That is now far from true. The decline is a matter of real concern to those who care about the society and its people, a concern that should not be contaminated by anything like this sorry performance.

NOAM CHOMSKY
ORO VALLEY, ARIZ.

A Puzzling Decision

Re “No Cross Words,” by Joshua Kosman and Henri Picciotto [April 6]: I am a lifelong liberal, but I subscribe to *The Nation* because of the puzzle by Kosman and Picciotto. When the puzzle goes, so will I.

MATTHEW FIELD
HASTINGS, ENGLAND

I quit *The Atlantic* after it yanked its puzzle and stubbornly did not read it again until 2020. At the same time, I’ve remained loyal to the increasingly weird *Harper’s* largely because of its excellent monthly puzzle. What do you expect us all to do while we are trapped at home by the pandemic? This is just so mean!

AMY BRUNVAND
SALT LAKE CITY

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Can Biden Go Left?

Basketball was never Joe Biden's sport. His football prowess helped get him elected president of his high school class. It also gave him the confidence to overcome the stutter that plagued him throughout his childhood. But to win in November, he'll need to answer a question more often asked on the basketball court: Can he go to his left?

His endorsement by Bernie Sanders ended a roller coaster primary campaign. Remember, this was the candidate who, after dominating the national polls for months, finished fourth in Iowa and, after placing fifth in New Hampshire, was reduced to pleading "It ain't over." Who staked his future on "overwhelming support from black and brown" voters, only to find in Nevada that Latinx voters preferred Sanders. Yet Biden's faith in his African American base was more than justified on Super Tuesday, when black voters delivered the kind of comeback usually associated with a defibrillator.

Faithful readers will know *The Nation* preferred a different nominee. That puts us in the company of many others—particularly voters under 45—whose support is going to be needed to defeat Donald Trump, a president whose reelection would be a catastrophic blow to all of the causes we value. Denying Trump the chance to appoint even one more justice to the Supreme Court should be reason enough to get out of bed on November 3. But then if the composition of the court were a sufficient motivator, Trump wouldn't have been elected in the first place.

Like Hillary Clinton, Biden won the nomination while losing the battle of ideas. Like her, he has already indicated he'll allow his rival significant influence over the party's platform. This time, though, it needs to be more than a series of empty promises.

Biden's letter assuring Sanders supporters they "are more than welcome. [They're] needed" was a step in the right direction. So, too, was the tone of the livestream announcing Sanders's endorsement—as was the news that Sanders and Biden staffers would work together to hammer out policy on the economy, education, immigration, health care, criminal justice, and climate change.

But these task forces must be more than an exercise. They need to reflect the recognition that, as

Sanders demonstrated beyond all doubt, the future of the Democratic Party is on the left. If the great achievement of his 2016 campaign was to shift the center ground of American politics, in 2020 Sanders went further, building a truly diverse coalition of young people of all races, working-class voters, Latinx voters, and progressives. Without the support of every element of that movement, a Democratic victory in November will remain out of reach.

Conventional wisdom says Democratic nominees must pivot to the center to win in November. Given the stakes, that wouldn't just be foolish. It would be criminally negligent.

Biden has demonstrated a willingness to reverse course, adopting Elizabeth Warren's position on bankruptcy reform in March. When he announced his proposals to lower the age for Medicare eligibility to 60 and to forgive student loans for low-income and middle-class students

who attended public or historically black colleges and universities, he credited Sanders.

But it will take more than gestures to win over the Sanders movement. On immigration and incarceration, Biden has amends to make, particularly to Latinx communities terrorized by deportation. Likewise on Social Security: He needs to disown his past as a politician more concerned with balanced budgets than with human suffering. Biden needs to show he understands that returning to the past—whether in our politics or our broken health care system—is simply no longer an option.

The current pandemic and the economic collapse it has triggered provide perfect cover for such a rethink. Sanders may have endorsed Biden, but as Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor recently argued in *The New Yorker*, "reality has endorsed" Sanders. The question is how far Biden will go in taking his cue from reality.

D.D. GUTTENPLAN FOR *THE NATION*

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BY THE NUMBERS

17.6%

Percentage of the Latino population in the US that works in industries most at risk of a coronavirus-led recession—higher than any other demographic

78%

Percentage of health care workers who are women

21%

Percentage of US Postal Service employees who are black—nearly twice their share of the total workforce

61%

Percentage of New York City's urban transit employees who are black or Latino

25%

Percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives working in service jobs; 18 percent of the total population works in this field

36%

Percentage of nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides who are black

—Meerabelle Jesuthasan



Dangerous Voting

Wisconsinites are democracy's canaries in the coal mine.

Republicans have opened a new front in their war on American democracy, and it is the cruelest yet. Refusing to heed warnings that in-person voting in Wisconsin's April 7 elections could spread the coronavirus, they worked with judicial allies to block a move by the state's Democratic governor to postpone in-person voting and extend the absentee deadline so Wisconsinites could safely cast ballots by mail.

"Wisconsin's election offers a nightmare vision of what the whole country could see in the fall," warned Ben Wikler, the Democratic Party of Wisconsin's chairman. "A fight where Democrats struggle to balance democracy with public health, and the GOP remorselessly weaponizes courts, election laws, and the coronavirus itself to disenfranchise millions of voters who stand in its way." If the coronavirus lingers or spikes anew in the fall, this could be a recurring nightmare.

The bare-bones story of the Wisconsin fiasco is jarring. Republican legislative leaders openly mocked and obstructed efforts by Governor Tony Evers to do what 15 other states had already done: restructure election plans to avoid sending voters to the polls while they were under orders to stay at home. Why? Wisconsin voters were deciding the fate of a state Supreme Court justice appointed by the previous governor, Republican Scott Walker. "Republicans," observed *Politico*, "calculated that holding the election in the midst of the pandemic gave incumbent conservative justice Dan Kelly a better chance of holding his seat." The scheme failed; Kelly was ousted.

That hard-win victory ought not obscure the lengths to which the GOP went to thwart it. When Evers issued an election-eve order to block in-person voting and extend the timeline for casting and returning absentee ballots, Republicans got their allies on the conservative-dominated state Supreme Court to upend his order, and conservatives on the US Supreme Court intervened to thwart a federal judge's order to make absentee voting easier.

Tens of thousands of Wisconsinites had to choose between voting and staying safe. For those who are immunocompromised and saw the window for receiving absentee ballots closed by the courts, it was no choice at all; they were disenfranchised. Others took the risk, even as epidemiologists warned the elections could become a public health disaster—especially for the already hard-hit African American community in Milwaukee. "People died fighting for the right to vote, and now people might die if they vote," Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes said on Election Day. "Politicians are silencing the voices of black and brown people or putting us in harm's way for their own partisan gain."

This was the ugliest example of voter suppression in a state that has, over the past decade, been a proving ground for the GOP's win-at-any-cost ethos. Of course, Donald Trump was paying attention. As the president at-

tacked vote-by-mail plans to increase safety and fairness in the November elections, Wikler warned that what happened in Wisconsin won't stay in Wisconsin.

But the Democrats are not powerless. They need to demand—with hard bargaining that forces the Republicans' hand—that funding for safe elections is included in federal stimulus packages and in tight state budgets. They need to conduct a massive education campaign to promote early and absentee voting. And they need to channel the anger of Wisconsinites forced to choose between voting and safety into a clear warning that Trump and his allies will stop at nothing in their deadly pursuit of power.

JOHN NICHOLS

Anti-Abortion Opportunism

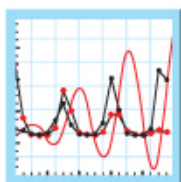
There is no good time to restrict access to abortion.

Over the past few weeks, eight states have tried to implement—with varying degrees of success—measures suspending abortions, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Several more states are poised to include abortion in bans on nonessential procedures. Advocacy groups representing abortion providers filed suit in several states that have used the outbreak as a pretext to further restrict abortion access. So far, the litigation in Texas has taken the most tumultuous path: Last month a federal district court suspended implementation of a new policy banning all abortion care. The Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit then overturned that decision, allowing the state's ban to take effect based on a "critical interest in protecting the public health." In a stunning rebuke to the appellate court, the district judge reissued a narrowed restraining order, permitting medication abortion and abortion for those who might exceed 22 weeks of gestation, when terminations become illegal in Texas. One day later, a divided panel of the Fifth Circuit again blocked the district court's order, only to lift that stay this week. But the battle is far from over. Texas could ask the Supreme Court for relief, and the full bench of the Fifth Circuit could hear another petition. At the moment, people can seek medication abortion in Texas, but for how long is uncertain.

The legal disputes over these "emergency" abortion bans concern what's best for public health. But responding to Covid-19 by suspending abortions is counterproductive. For one thing, the bans will not actually preserve health care resources.

Almost all abortions happen in clinics providing only reproductive health care. For pregnancies before 15 weeks, minimal protective equipment is used. These outpatient procedures, called aspiration abortions, require no sterile field, incision, or general anesthesia, and a medication abortion is delivered by ingesting two pills: typically, the first in a health center and the second at home. It requires no protective equipment whatsoever and takes up no hospital space. For both types of abortion, the risks

COMMENT



THE SCORE/BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

You Must Be Kidding

I've worked from home for seven years, but my workday is now punctuated by new sounds: the clamor of little feet and loud voices as my young upstairs neighbors learn from home.

Every state has closed schools in response to the coronavirus outbreak; some are not resuming the academic year. That has sent at least 55.1 million students home. But many parents have come to count on school as a form of child care while they go to their jobs. Both parents work in nearly two-thirds of married couples with children under the age of 18, and about three-quarters of single mothers and 84 percent of single fathers do. That's 22.6 million families that now have nowhere to send their children.

If parents are lucky enough to have a job

Here in the US, Washington, DC, has been working toward something similar. In 2009 the city started offering free, universal preschool, which is now available for kids ages 3 to 4. The program increased the labor force participation rate for women with young children by 10 percentage points. You can dig back into US history to see a similar impact. During World War II, the federal government ran universal, low-cost child care for the Rosies going into factories as riveters. Where it was available, women were more likely to work and to work longer hours.

But that program ended when the war did, and the US hasn't had universal child care since. We know our economy is suffering for it. The labor force participation rate for women in the US has fallen behind that of other developed countries, thanks, in part, to our lack of investment in early care. In 2016 alone, nearly 2 million parents with children age 5 or younger quit their jobs, turned down offers, or significantly changed their work arrangements

because they had problems getting child care. The burden falls hardest on women, who are still expected to be the primary caregivers. Mothers who can't find child care are significantly less likely to be employed than those who can.

Tens of millions of parents of older children whose schools have closed have now joined their ranks. Their options are bleak. Since older people are at higher risk of complications from Covid-19, grandparents can't help. If child care centers are open, they're likely to be serving only essential workers. Many parents are trying to continue to work and care for their children at the same time—an arrangement that has health experts predicting a spike in pediatric injuries, given that there's only so much attention a person has to split between work and child care. It's unclear how long our political and business leaders can keep pretending that everything is normal and that parents can work as they did before without anyone else to watch their kids.

Eventually, the crisis will pass, and schools will reopen. But when they do, we shouldn't forget this painful lesson: A smoothly

functioning economy is one in which people who want to work can do so. Affordable and accessible child care plays an enormous role in making that a reality. It's just as true for infants and toddlers as it is for middle and high schoolers. Just as we've made public school available to all, we should make free, high-quality care for children age 5 or younger available to all parents, too.

Bryce Covert

The Coronavirus Proves the Economy Needs Child Care

With 55 million students home from school, the nation's child care problems are obvious.



2 Universal child care could fix that.

Quebec: Share of working women who had young children before and after universal child care:



Washington, DC: Share of working women who had young children before and after universal preschool:



Sources: Education Week; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013; Inroads, Winter/Spring 2018; Center for American Progress. 2020 infographic by Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz

A smoothly functioning economy is one in which people who want to work are able to do so.

that lets them work from home, they're doing so with children, who need a watchful eye and, if possible, something enriching to do. Things are even harder for anyone who still has to leave the house to go to work. Those people are now scrambling to find backup child care arrangements to keep their kids safe.

We don't normally think of public school as child care, but schools are generally a safe place for children when their parents go to work. We have lots of evidence that offering something similar for children at younger ages would allow even more people to be employed. And now we're witnessing the terrifying opposite: what happens to parents—and the economy—when free, accessible, quality child care is yanked away.

One of the older examples of the economic benefits of offering inexpensive, universal care for young children comes from Canada. After the province of Quebec instituted a universal child care program in 1997, its share of working women ages 26 to 44 reached close to 85 percent, the highest in the world. The increased number of women in the workforce elevated tax revenues so much that the program essentially pays for itself now.



IN MEMORIAM

Perry Rosenstein, (1926–2020)

Perry Rosenstein, a 94-year-old-victim of Covid-19 who died on April 3, was one of a kind. When asked why he joined the Navy during World War II (he saw action in Okinawa and Guam), he would say it was to fight fascism. As his son Neal said, had Perry been of age, he would have gone to Spain with the Lincoln Brigade.

When, after the war, he was blacklisted from teaching because of his radical work against racism, he went into business for himself and made a fortune manufacturing metal fasteners. Among other philanthropic causes, he used that wealth to support the work of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.

In 1983 he founded the Puffin Foundation, whose mission is to nourish activism, human rights, social justice, and cultural life. Over the years, Puffin has joined forces with many progressive institutions, including *Democracy Now!*, *In These Times*, *Dissent*, *Jacobin*, The Nation Institute (now Type Media Center), and not least, *The Nation*. Under Perry's leadership, Puffin made possible scores of student journalist fellowships and Student Nation, among other efforts, to encourage progressive work and thinking among a new generation.

It has been *The Nation's* privilege to work not only with Perry but also with his wife, Gladys, Puffin's executive director, and with Neal, who share and have helped expand Perry's commitment to progressive causes and values. We miss him more than we can say. —Victor Navasky

to the pregnant person's health are very low, and complications are extremely rare.

In fact, in the months to come, outlawing abortions will likely exacerbate the strain on the health care system. People who lack access to abortions and can afford to will travel to neighboring states, potentially contributing to the pandemic's spread. States without bans will see some portion of the more than 53,000 Texas women who terminate pregnancies annually. Overextended providers will be stretched even thinner, causing further delays and increasing costs to travelers who would otherwise stay at home. Or individuals will induce their own abortions. Though self-managed abortion can be safe, physicians and hospitals will be needed if complications arise. Finally, a surge in unplanned pregnancies will create even more stress on health care professionals.

An effective means to protect public health and conserve resources would be to administer medication abortions using telehealth. Recognizing the advantages of telemedicine, states like Texas have relaxed restrictions on remote diagnosis and treatment—except for abortion. In addition, people seeking medication abortions already faced numerous restrictions, none of which are applied to similar office-based procedures. Texas, for example, unnecessarily imposes patient-clinic contact not only by banning telemedicine abortions but also by requiring that a physician dispense and be present during a medication abortion. It also mandates an in-person ultrasound and follow-up appointment; remote consultations before a procedure are permitted only if the patient lives over 100 miles from the nearest abortion provider.

Abortion bans are not responsible health care policy. The people they hurt the most are those for whom the pandemic has had a devastating effect: people with little or no income, people of color, immigrants, parents juggling child or elder care, people living in rural areas, and those reliant on public transportation. Layer on top of those stressors these unappealing options: seek an illegal abortion, travel to another state, or carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.

The current and worsening crisis in abortion access foreshadows what will happen if the Supreme Court eliminates the constitutional protection for abortion rights. The court could make this decision either as an emergency order or in a decision expected early this summer. That case, *June Medical Services v. Russo*, will determine if restrictions that provide no benefit for individual or public health and that significantly impair access to abortion services will stand. Regardless of the judiciary's response to the retrograde actions of certain state governments, thoughtful policy-makers can still eliminate barriers to safe abortion services.

Responding to Covid-19 by suspending abortions is counter-productive.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam recently removed prior restrictions on people seeking abortions, and Washington, New York, and Illinois have designated abortion procedures as essential.

Planned Parenthood has announced that it will expand telehealth to all 50 states, allowing eligible patients to remotely access services like counseling and prescriptions. Better yet, the Food and Drug Administration could end or stop enforcing an outdated policy—one undermined by substantial evidence—that prohibits the delivery of physician-prescribed medication abortion to patients' homes.

If we take the states suspending abortion care at their word, then no-touch terminations (in which all medical supervision happens over the phone or online) would achieve the public health goals that their current bans cannot. Telehealth for medication abortions can ease the burdens on pregnant people, health care workers, and health systems in light of the unprecedented challenges of containing Covid-19. Unfortunately, the current map of abortion could foreshadow a legal landscape without constitutional protections for abortion. Courts can step in to defend those rights in the face of arbitrary state action, but in the long run, that isn't enough. With or without a pandemic, we need laws that protect reproductive health rather than hinder it at every chance that arises

RACHEL REBOUCHÉ

Rachel Rebouché is a professor of law at Temple University.

Force the Spring

This 50th Earth Day, stop the money pipeline.

Nineteen-seventy was a simpler time. (February was a simpler time too, but for a moment let's think outside the pandemic bubble.)

Simpler because our environmental troubles could be easily seen. The air above our cities was filthy, and the water in our lakes and streams was gross. There was nothing subtle about it. In New York City, the environmental lawyer Albert Butzel described a permanently yellow horizon: "I not only saw the pollution, I wiped it off my windowsills." Or consider the testimony of a city medical examiner: "The person who spent his life in the Adirondacks has nice pink lungs. The city dweller's are black as coal." You've likely heard of Cleveland's Cuyahoga River catching fire, but here's how New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller described the Hudson south of Albany: "one great septic tank that has been rendered nearly useless for water supply, for swimming, or to support the rich fish life that once abounded there." Everything that people say about the air and water

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in China and India right now was said of America's cities then.

It's no wonder that people mobilized: 20 million Americans took to the streets for the first Earth Day in 1970—10 percent of America's population at the time, perhaps the single greatest day of political protest in the country's history. And it worked. Worked politically because Congress quickly passed the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and scientifically because those laws had the desired effect. In essence, they stuck enough filters on smokestacks, car exhausts, and factory effluent pipes that, before long, the air and water were unmistakably cleaner. The nascent Environmental Protection Agency commissioned a series of photos that showed just how filthy things were. Even for those of us who were alive then, it's hard to imagine that we tolerated this.

But we should believe it, because now we face even greater challenges that we're doing next to nothing about. And one reason is you can't see them.

The carbon dioxide molecule is invisible; at today's levels you can't see it or smell it, and it doesn't do anything to you. Carbon with one oxygen molecule? That's what kills you in a closed garage if you leave the car running. But two oxygen molecules? All that does is trap heat in the atmosphere. Melt ice caps. Raise seas. Change weather patterns. But slowly enough that most of the time, we don't quite see it.

And it's a more complex moment for another reason. You can filter carbon monoxide easily. It's a trace gas, a tiny percentage of what comes from a power plant. But carbon dioxide is the exact opposite. It's most of what comes pouring out when you burn coal or gas or

oil. There's no catalytic converter for CO₂, which means you have to take down the fossil fuel industry.

That in turn means you have to take on not just the oil companies but also the banks, asset managers, and insurance companies that invest in them (and may even own them, in the wake of the current economic crash). You have to take on, that is, the heart of global capital.

And so we are. Stop the Money Pipeline, a coalition of environmental and climate justice groups running from the small and specialized to the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, formed last fall to try to tackle the biggest money on earth. Banks like Chase—the planet's largest by market capitalization—which has funneled a quarter-trillion dollars to the fossil fuel industry since the Paris Agreement of 2015. Insurers like Liberty Mutual, still insuring tar sands projects even as pipeline builders endanger Native communities by trying to build the Keystone XL during a pandemic.

This campaign sounds quixotic, but it seemed to be getting traction until the coronavirus pandemic hit. In January, BlackRock announced that it was going to put climate at the heart of its investment analyses. Liberty Mutual, under similar pressure from activists, began to edge away from coal. And Chase—well, Earth Day would have seen activists engaging in civil disobedience in several thousand bank lobbies across America, sort of like the protest in January that helped launch the campaign (and sent me, among others, off in handcuffs). But we called that off; there's no way we were going to risk carrying the microbe into jails, where the people already locked inside have little chance of social distancing.

Still, the pandemic may be causing as much trouble for the fossil fuel industry as our campaign hoped to. With the demand for oil cratering, it's clear that these companies have no future. The divestment campaign that, over a decade, has enlisted \$14 trillion in endowments and portfolios in the climate fight has a new head of steam.

Our job—a more complex one than faced our Earth Day predecessors 50 years ago—is to force the spring. We need to speed the transition to the solar panels and wind turbines that engineers have worked so mightily to improve and are now the cheapest way to generate power. The only thing standing in the way is the political power of the fossil fuel companies, on clear display as President Trump does everything in his power to preserve their dominance. That's hard to overcome. Hard but simple. Just as in 1970, it demands unrelenting pressure from citizens. That pressure is coming. Indigenous nations, frontline communities, faith groups, climate scientists, and savvy investors are joining together, and their voices are getting louder. Seven million of us were in the streets last September. That's not 20 million, but it's on the way.

We can't be on the streets right now. So we'll do what we can on the boulevards of the Internet. Join us for Earth Day Live, three days of digital activism beginning April 22. We're in a race, and we're gaining fast.

BILL MCKIBBEN

With the demand for oil cratering, it's clear that these companies have no future.

COMIX NATION

PETER KUPER



Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and the founder of 350.org.

WITHOUT ONLINE ACCESS, YOU'RE ONLY GETTING HALF THE STORY.

(SOUND FAMILIAR?)

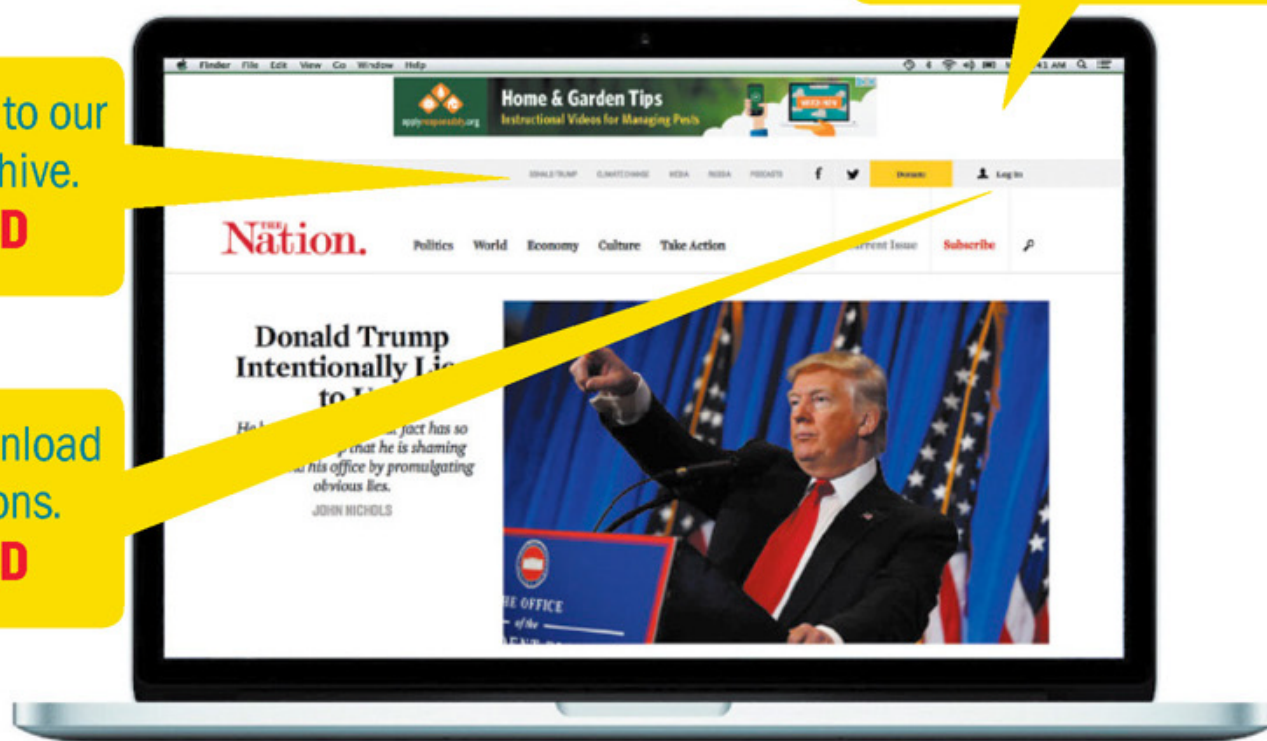
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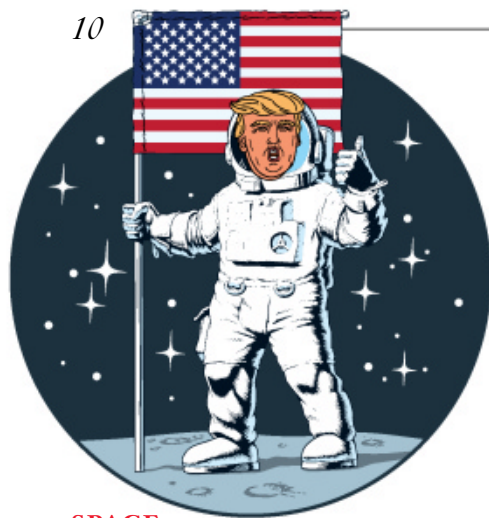


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SPACE

Asking for the Moon

As coronavirus-related deaths in the US continued to soar and many of the planet's people sheltered in place in their primary dwellings, President Trump was seized by an urge to think big—cosmically, even. There was no Covid-19 outside Earth's orbit. Space suits could make for great personal protective equipment. And blasting off into outer space was the ultimate way to practice social distancing. With the economy in shambles and earthbound industry grinding to a halt, the solution was obvious. To reinstate US supremacy, the country should go where no extractive industry has gone before: the moon!

An executive order, dated April 6, followed these otherworldly revelations, noting that the US never ratified a 1979 agreement *not* to colonize the moon and that to ensure the "successful long-term exploration of the Moon, Mars and other celestial bodies," it would henceforth partner with private companies "to recover and use resources, including water and certain minerals, in outer space." The goal was to make sure that no aspiring corporate space miners would be discouraged from pursuing their ambitions by arcane treaties and international red tape. And while the timing was perhaps in poor taste, given the havoc the coronavirus has wrought, Trump's executive order sent an all-American message of frontierism, adventure, and opportunity. Planet Earth may be on lockdown, but the moon was open for business.

—Atossa Araxia Abrahamian

Eric Alterman



The American Berserk

Accurately describing the Trump presidency stretches the limits of our imagination.

The catastrophe that is the Donald Trump presidency exceeds human imagination. It wreaks destruction in so many directions simultaneously that any attempt at even a reasonably comprehensive account strains both patience and credulity (to say nothing of column lengths).

Hence the need for metaphor. And yet, here again, nothing really works. This inadequacy of language itself is a crucial factor in our inability to recognize the scope of the danger that Trump and his movement represent.

Philip Roth has been earning prophecy points of late. He describes a scenario somewhat similar to a Trump presidency in his 2004 novel, *The Plot Against America*, now an HBO miniseries. In its pages, he imagines an American strain of fascism, which he locates in a fictional Charles Lindbergh presidency. Having defeated Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940 election, Lindbergh seeks to ally the United States with Nazi Germany abroad

and inspires anti-Semitic riots at home. (As it happens, Roth's last novel before his death in 2018, 2010's *Nemesis*, focuses on the polio pandemic of the 1940s. Like Albert Camus's *The Plague*, it portrays the myriad human frailties and quiet acts of heroism that outbreaks of disease reveal and inspire.) Despite his prescient fiction, the writer who coined the term "indigenous American berserk" (in 1997's *American Pastoral*) to capture our country's propensity for violence was, by his own admission, no match for the reality of a Trump presidency. In a series of e-mails published by *The New Yorker* in 2017, Roth wrote, "It is easier to comprehend the election of an imaginary President like Charles Lindbergh than an actual President like Donald Trump.... It isn't Trump as a character, a human type—the real-estate type, the callow and callous killer capitalist—that outstrips the imagination. It is Trump as President of the United States."

Impressively, at a symposium at Stanford University way back in 1960, Roth anticipated this phenomenon as well, calling "the American reality...a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist."

Trump is constantly proving Roth right.

Searching for an apt metaphor, I liked the implicit comparison, by *The Washington Post's* Alexandra Petri, of Trump to a goldfish, lost in a "pastless, futureless, contextless void." Daniel Drezner, writing in the same pages, fixes on the term "toddler," collecting about 1,300 examples of when "a Trump staffer, subordinate or ally—in other words, someone with a rooting interest in the success of Trump's presidency—nonetheless described him the way most of us might describe a petulant 2-year-old." But even these fail to do justice to Trump's compulsive malevolence—his need to destroy what he cannot bend to his will.

What's more, a focus on Trump himself does not explain how this miscreant became president of the United States or how he retains the fealty of roughly 40 percent of its populace, a significant portion of the media, and one of its two major political parties. Searching my (admittedly failing) memory of American culture, the best I can do, metaphorically speaking, is a *Twilight Zone* episode and one of my

least favorite Martin Scorsese movies.

As far as I can tell, the first person to compare our political reality to the 1961 *Twilight Zone* episode "It's a Good Life"—based on a 1953 short story by Jerome Bixby—was *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman in April 2017. It tells the story of a 6-year-old boy born with the power to destroy anyone who fails to meet his every wish. The child's entire town lives in fear of failing to anticipate his irrational and obviously immature demands or meet his constant need for praise. But what is missing from these comparisons is Trump's deliberate cruelty; goldfish, toddlers, and 6-year-olds are not purposely evil.

To capture that aspect of Trump, I think of Scorsese's 2002 opus, *Gangs of New York*, which depicts the slums and politics of 19th century Manhattan. In 1839, New York's former mayor Philip Hone observed, "This city is infested by gangs of



This failure of language is a factor in our inability to recognize the scope of the danger that Trump and his movement represent.

hardened wretches” who “patrol the streets making night hideous and insulting all who are not strong enough to defend themselves.” The thing is, among these gangs of hardened wretches was the one belonging to William “Boss” Tweed and his Tammany Hall ring. Enjoying the power of the state—or at least the city—they could torture and murder with impunity. Now, Scorsese has never been known for historical verisimilitude. Violence is his forte, and in this case, I think, its excessiveness ruins the movie. The film’s bloodshed does, however, provide a metaphor for Trump’s presidency: a metropole ruled by thugs demanding the same deference that men in their position have traditionally been granted and then deploying their offices to pillage for their own pleasure.

All of the above is pitched at a rather abstract level, but anyone who has paid even the slightest attention to Trump since he was first warned about the potential

consequences of the coronavirus has witnessed the evidence. To describe him accurately requires the kind of language that journalists do not generally allow themselves. As the constitutional law professor Laurence Tribe tweeted on March 26, “Trump is ensuring the avoidable death of countless New Yorkers.... His moral culpability is that of a murderer even though the law doesn’t call him one.” Instead we get Trump’s meanderings, lies, and conspiracy theories broadcast live on television every day and respectful headlines on top of stories about “disagreements” between people with a lifetime’s expertise in epidemiology, like Dr. Anthony Fauci, and a self-satisfied moron hawking snake-oil solutions. The advent of Covid-19 is a crisis, to be sure, but even more so is a political culture that has produced a coronavirus-like presidency, implacably infecting and destroying what remains of our ailing democracy. ■

To describe Trump accurately requires the kind of language that journalists do not generally allow themselves.

SNAPSHOT / LINTAO ZHANG

At a Distance

Commuters wear protective masks and keep their distance on the subway during rush hour on Monday, April 13, in Beijing. After one of the largest lockdowns in history, China is beginning to ease restrictions, though certain subway cars will carry cameras to identify who isn’t wearing a mask.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

PATTERN

Trump demands that governors “be appreciative” of his coronavirus response.
—news reports

The governors seeking equipment from Trump
Know praise is the path to a hearing.
Extortion’s Trump’s game, as it was with Ukraine—
For flattery this time, not smearing.





The Nation.

The Extinction Crisis Come

The rich San Francisco Bay ecosystem is collapsing—and the region's liberal leaders are part of the problem.

JIMMY TOBIAS



es Home

LARRY COLLINS IS A BIG, GREGARIOUS MAN WITH tobacco-stained teeth, a salty tongue, and the commanding presence of a sea captain. For 40 years he has earned his living as a commercial fisherman, slinging wild-caught seafood from a bustling warehouse on Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. Collins loves his profession; it has put enough money in his pocket to raise kids, buy a home, and save up for retirement in one of the most expensive cities in America. Sitting in his cramped office, with the smell of fresh fish wafting in from the docks, he talked about the days when more than 4,000 boats would head out from California's ports each season and ply the waters of the Pacific Coast, trapping

"We have diverted more water from the ecosystem than any estuary that has survived. We are on the brink of losing the salmon, the smelt—all of it."

—Felicia Marcus

Jimmy Tobias is a contributor to The Nation. An investigative reporter, he covers conservation, civil society, and cities.

crabs and netting huge runs of Chinook salmon.

"I will give you the best salmon year in my whole career. It was 1988. We caught 1.4 million salmon in California, and another 800,000 escaped up the river," he said with obvious nostalgia.

That era, though, is long gone. These days, the local fishing industry is a withered remnant of its former self. In 2018 "we caught maybe 175,000 salmon, and 80,000 went up the river," Collins told me. "Fifty-three boats delivered 50 percent of what was caught." While some salmon seasons have been much better than others, such as the robust 2019 season, "the fishery has probably been reduced to 5 or 10 percent of what it used to be." Cut off from their ancestral breeding grounds by enormous dams, preyed on by invasive species, and deprived of the freshwater flows that are crucial to sustaining their populations, the salmon have suffered long-term decline and face an increasingly grim future.

"They are in terrible condition," Collins said, his voice rising. "And no one seems to give a fuck!"

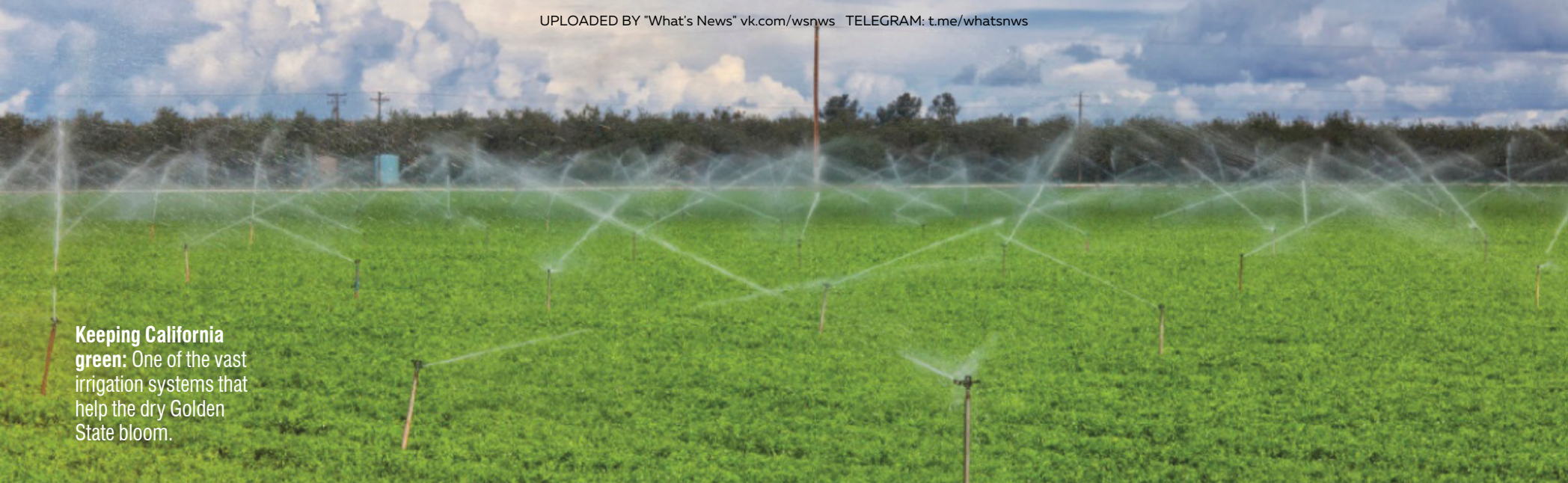
But it's not just the salmon that are suffering. The whole San Francisco Bay ecosystem—that enormous estuary with its maze of bays, rich delta, and associated rivers and streams—is in the midst of an ecological calamity. Decades of dam building and water extraction to quench the thirst of California's growing population and the needs of its mighty agriculture industry have starved the state's waterways, as well as the bay itself, of crucial freshwater supplies. As a result, the entire estuary is under enormous stress. Its water quality is dicey, in some places too stagnant or too saline or beset by algal blooms. Its aquatic food web is fraying, threatening bird species and marine mammals, including orcas. And its fish populations, from the imperiled salmon to tiny smelt, have plummeted. "The fisheries for Chinook salmon, starry flounder, and other species are collapsing," said Jon Rosenfield, a senior scientist at San Francisco Baykeeper, a water quality organization.

The Bay Area, in other words, is grappling with a local manifestation of our global mass extinction crisis.

"We have pillaged that ecosystem," said Felicia Marcus, a former chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board. "We have diverted more water from the ecosystem than any estuary that has survived. We are on the brink of losing the salmon, the smelt—all of it."

There is much at stake. San Francisco's estuary, one of the largest in North America, is an ecological mixing bowl where Pacific saltwater meets the freshwater runoff that flows from the Sierra Nevada through the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers into San Francisco Bay and on to the ocean. The blending of these waters produces rich habitat for salmon, smelt, shrimp, crabs, pelicans, cormorants, ducks, whales, seals, and humans. If it continues its decline, everything from fishing jobs and tourist businesses to tribal food security and the general economic stability of Northern California could go with it.

But there are ways to abate this crisis. In 2018, California water officials took strides to ease the strain on San Francisco's estuary by moving to update and strengthen a body of regulations known as the Bay-Delta Plan. The amendments, which get made every couple of decades, seek to restrict the quantity of water that cities



Keeping California green: One of the vast irrigation systems that help the dry Golden State bloom.

and agricultural operators can divert from the bay's tributaries and thereby restore the ailing ecosystem.

The updated Bay-Delta Plan is meant to help save the bay, its watershed, and its wildlife, so one might assume it would have widespread support among the region's politicians. But that's not the way water politics works in big, dry, crowded California. The plan's new mandates are facing staunch opposition from a host of powerful antagonists, including the city of San Francisco, that glittering capital of left coast liberalism. Mayor London Breed, the city's attorney, and its water utility have taken steps to oppose the updated plan. The city's political establishment is in the midst of a legal battle to block stronger environmental protections for the San Francisco Bay ecosystem. The establishment's allies in this fight: the state's industrial agriculture interests and the federal government under President Donald Trump.

"I am profoundly disappointed in San Francisco," said Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, the executive director of the conservation group Restore the Delta and a veteran of California's water wars. "Everyone is worried about fighting and protecting their share of the water, and they don't understand that if you can't keep your water systems alive and healthy, then we are going to end up in a very bad place. They are interested in short-term gain instead of long-term strategy."

IN MAY OF LAST YEAR, A UNITED NATIONS-BACKED PANEL of scientists and policy experts released an alarming report stating that the world is in the grip of an "unprecedented" and "accelerating" biodiversity crisis. The panel found that 1 million species around the globe are at risk of extinction, many within the coming decades. "The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed," warned Josef Settele, a research scientist who cochaired the panel, upon the report's release. "This loss is a direct result of human activity."

The story of San Francisco Bay is a case study in how such destructive human activity manifests at the local level and wreaks havoc on prized natural resources. It's an object lesson in the way widespread global forces—industrial farming, urban growth, climate change—scramble ecosystems and push species to the brink of collapse. But it's also a California story, featuring the powerful industries and particular environmental conditions that have shaped the destiny of the Golden State.

Much of California is semidesert. While the state boasts mighty rivers, a snow-capped sierra, and the lush Bay Area estuary, its cities are often parched. "Los Angeles is drier than Beirut; Sacramento is as dry as the Sahel; San Francisco is just slightly rainier than Chihuahua," writes Marc Reisner in *Cadillac Desert*, his magisterial book on the history of water development in the American West. And California's Central Valley, the heart of the state's \$50 billion-a-year agriculture industry, is a

place where "rainless summers" mean that "no important crop except wheat [can] be raised without irrigation." Yet this semidesert is home today to nearly 40 million people and one of the largest agriculture industries on the planet.

The only way this paradox is possible is through overwhelming human intervention, specifically by the federal government. Starting in the New Deal era, under the auspices of the Bureau of Reclamation, the US government embarked on a massive water development spree that saw it build huge dams across the West to trap, store, and divert water from rivers to cities, farms, and ranches in Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and yes, California. It was water welfare on a massive scale, meant to support small farmers and growing towns across the region, and for a while it enchanted the American imagination. Who hasn't heard of the Hoover Dam, completed in 1936 on the Colorado River, which still supplies huge quantities of water to Los Angeles and Arizona, among other places?

In California the Bureau of Reclamation's enormous water development efforts were known as the Central Valley Project, or CVP. It created a sprawling network of dams, reservoirs, and canals that sucks up the state's river water and supplies it at heavily subsidized rates to Central Valley farmers and to residents of Los Angeles and other Southern California cities. A second development, called the State Water Project, or SWP, was initiated in the early 1960s to dam even more rivers and provide the water to California's farmers.

In many ways, these two projects, which primarily draw water from tributaries that feed San Francisco Bay, made modern California possible. Above all, they created the state's agriculture industry, saving it from impending groundwater depletion and providing it with a constant supply of publicly subsidized water. And while the CVP and the SWP were conceived to support small farmers and promote a sort of Jeffersonian ideal, they ultimately sparked the rise of the Big Agriculture empires that have enriched land-owning elites.

These projects, Reisner writes in *Cadillac Desert*, ended up being "one of the country's foremost examples of socialism for the rich." Today, California's agriculture industry accounts for as much as 80 percent of water use in the state.

The projects also rained misery on some of the state's Indigenous tribes, including the Winnemem Wintu. The 1945 completion of the Shasta Dam, a centerpiece of the CVP, inundated the land on which the majority of Winnemem Wintu villages stood. "The tribe was moved

The story of San Francisco Bay is a case study in how destructive human activity manifests at the local level and wreaks havoc on prized natural resources.



The tide is low:
San Francisco
Bay's tidelands and
waterway tributaries.

out of their villages,” said Mark Miyoshi, its historic preservation officer. “They didn’t have anything. They were made homeless. We were the sacrifice that allowed the Central Valley Project to be constructed.”

The CVP and the SWP devastated the state’s natural environment, too, wrecking streams, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and wildlife. Intensive water diversions by agricultural and urban water users result in San Francisco Bay’s being deprived, on average, of approximately 50 percent of its annual freshwater inflow. Sometimes that figure reaches as high as 70 percent.

These water diversions have created a kind of permanent drought for the bay. Among other negative effects, this has heightened salinity levels in the estuary and harmed species like the endangered delta smelt, a tiny iridescent fish that once numbered in the millions. In 2018 and 2019, after decades of decline, a thorough survey of the waters failed to turn up a single smelt.

Meanwhile, the dams cut off Chinook salmon—the state’s most iconic fish species—from their ancient spawning grounds high in Northern California’s mountains. Along with industrial pollution and mining, the dams have led to the long-term decline of the winter-run Chinooks, which are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act. Winter-run Chinooks once came in droves each year from the Pacific Ocean, swimming through San Francisco Bay and up into the California highland interior. These days, only a few hundred to a few thousand return to spawn beneath a giant dam on the Sacramento River. The Central Valley’s unique spring run of Chinook salmon is also listed under the Endangered Species Act.

This shocking decline has contributed, in turn, to the collapse of the orca populations that depend on Pacific Coast salmon for their survival. The number of so-called southern resident orcas has dropped from a high of 98 in 1995 to just 73 as of August 2019. The population of these majestic animals is now at a 30-year low.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY, LIKE most ecosystems, exists in a delicate balance, the fate of its species intertwined, their lives dependent on one another. But as in many ecosystems, some species exert more influence than others, their pres-

**Winter-run
Chinooks
once came in
droves from
the Pacific
Ocean.
These days,
only a few
hundred to a
few thousand
return to
spawn.**

Endangered: An orca speeds through the water—one of many species threatened by the collapse of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem.



ence holding the system together like a keystone in an arch. California’s Chinook salmon is one of these essential species. Over the millennia, the multitudes of Chinook traveling between sea and river have delivered vast loads of rich ocean nutrients to inland California, all while providing sustenance to whales, seals, birds, bears, wolves, coyotes, humans, and even shrubs and trees. Now, as salmon numbers dwindle, other species are suffering too. Should the Chinook disappear, it’s unlikely that San Francisco Bay will ever really recover.

To get a look at the current state of this keystone species, I took a short trip with John McManus, a veteran environmentalist with the Golden State Salmon Association and a dogged defender of California’s fisheries. I met him on a drizzly morning last May in Daly City, south of San Francisco. He wheeled up in an old gray Toyota minivan, and we hit the road, crossing the Bay Bridge and winding through dense traffic until we arrived at the San Francisco Bay delta, where the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers merge. Once a wild landscape with some of the best soil on earth, the delta is now blanketed with farms and crisscrossed by canals and levees. It is also sinking below sea level as a result of groundwater depletion.

On the drive, McManus filled my brain with facts about dams, farms, and fish. “We really messed things up. This was such rich habitat once upon a time,” he said. “We lost about 80 or 90 percent of the historic salmon habitat when they dammed all the Central Valley rivers.”

The problem, he explained, begins at the very start of the salmon’s life cycle. Nowadays, the salmon that manage to hatch have a tough time making it out to the sea, where they grow into adulthood. When the tiny salmon swim down from the mountains, the low and irregular flow in the region’s rivers and streams causes lots of baby fish to get trapped in the delta’s artificial canals, where they’re preyed on by invasive species, like hungry striped bass, or sucked into irrigation pumps.

“If you’re a baby salmon,” McManus said, “and you’re coming down the Sacramento River trying to get to the ocean, if you get pulled into that delta cross channel, you will never be seen again. It’s curtains.”

About an hour into our drive, we pulled into a small gravel parking lot in the town of Woodbridge,



Hatched and ready: Truckloads of fingerling Chinook salmon are pumped into floating holding pens.

where two hulking tanker trucks were idling near the edge of the Mokelumne River. Inside each truck, swimming around in the pitch black, were approximately 100,000 baby salmon from a nearby hatchery. In an effort to prevent a total collapse of the salmon populations, the state and federal governments maintain about a dozen hatcheries across California that raise salmon and then release them into the wild.

We watched as a crew of technicians from the state's Department of Fish and Wildlife pieced together a long metal pipe and lowered it slowly into the fast-moving river. Then they pulled a lever. There was a soft rushing sound, followed by a burst of water from the end of the pipe, and a flurry of tiny fish gushed into the river. They were just a small fraction of the many millions that California's hatcheries raise each year.

This is what it takes to keep the salmon populations from crashing even further below their historical levels. "Without the hatcheries, you would see some salmon persist in small numbers, I'm guessing," McManus said. But "some might blink out. We would have lost winter-run Chinook salmon.... We would have lost them in the last drought without the hatcheries."

The baby fish kept pouring out of the trucks, and soon they were churning the water into whorls of glinting silver. Most of them, I soon learned, weren't likely to survive. They were an experimental group meant to determine whether any of them could make the perilous trip through the delta.

Bill Smith, a state employee in charge of the Mokelumne River Hatchery, wasn't optimistic. He said most of the baby fish would likely perish on their way to sea. Invasive predators "will take more than their fair share, and the [irrigation] pumps will take the rest," he said.



Gateway to the bay: The Golden Gate Bridge, which spans the strait between San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean.

TO SAVE SAN FRANCISCO'S THREATENED ESTUARY, TO really restore it, is a herculean task—one that, in a perfect world, would include stalling climate change; reining in urban growth, industrial agriculture, and pollution; and demolishing the dams that have devastated the landscape. But few hold out hope for such ambitious measures. Instead, most conservationists in the Bay Area are focused on a more pragmatic and immediate solution: restricting the amount of water that agricultural operators and cities are allowed to pull out of the delta's tributaries, thereby alleviating the human-made drought that has done so much damage to the region's watershed.

This is precisely what the state's water regulators sought to accomplish in December 2018, when, after a

long and painstaking process, they finalized the first of two updates to the Bay-Delta Plan's water quality standards. The amendments, which were crafted by the California State Water Resources Control Board, a powerful independent agency, require irrigators and city agencies to leave more water in certain key tributaries that sustain the bay and its many species.

In the case of San Francisco and nearby irrigation districts, the revised Bay-Delta Plan requires them to leave 30 to 50 percent of the water that would naturally flow through the Tuolumne, Stanislaus, and Merced rivers in the winter, spring, and early summer. The Tuolumne is the city's main source of drinking water and an important conveyor of fresh water from the Sierra Nevada to the San Francisco Bay delta; these days humans sometimes divert as much as 90 percent of its flow during the winter and spring snowmelt.

Some high-profile San Franciscans back the new regulations. Aaron Peskin, who represents District 3 on the city's Board of Supervisors, is a supporter of the updated Bay-Delta Plan. "San Francisco, I think, needs to be part of the solution as the stresses on the Tuolumne system and on the bay and delta become more profound and as our fisheries are on the verge of collapse," he said. "I think we have a political and social and environmental responsibility to do our part."

To that end, in the fall of 2018, as the regulators were finalizing the first phase of the new Bay-Delta Plan, Peskin introduced a resolution to signal the city's support for the move. The resolution, which was passed by the Board of Supervisors, barred the city attorney from pursuing any litigation meant to block the new regulations. "I thought we could establish that our policy was to adhere to what the state water board was going to mandate," Peskin said.

But then higher powers intervened. In November 2018, allegedly under pressure from Senator Dianne Feinstein, a key player in California water politics, Breed vetoed Peskin's resolution. (A spokesperson for Feinstein asserted that "she didn't directly weigh in" with the mayor about the matter.) "San Francisco, despite all of its left-leaning and environmentally inclined self-image, is in the midst of a huge growth spurt, as is Silicon Valley," Peskin said. His resolution and water use restrictions in general were "seen as being a threat to the long-term economic viability of San Francisco and the peninsula."

To save San Francisco Bay's threatened estuary, to really restore it, is a herculean task.



Shortly after his resolution was vetoed, San Francisco joined a lawsuit to block the first phase of the Bay-Delta Plan update. That lawsuit is ongoing, and the city has some strange bedfellows in its effort to stymie the new protections. A slurry of influential agriculture interests—including “Republican ranchers from the central part of our state,” Peskin said—are suing to block the updated plan; so is the Trump administration.

The fight over the Bay-Delta Plan, it is important to note, is unfolding in the midst of a broader legal and political struggle over environmental protections in California. The Trump administration is also working in lockstep with powerful agricultural interests to roll back the Endangered Species Act’s protections for California’s salmon, smelt, and orcas. Tellingly, the federal official orchestrating this pro-industry blitz is David Bernhardt, Trump’s secretary of the interior and a former lobbyist for some of Big Ag’s most influential water users in the state.

IN THEIR DEFENSE OF SAN FRANCISCO’S LAWSUIT, CITY officials say they are merely trying to rein in overzealous regulators. “This [legal action] is an unfortunate but necessary step to preserve the rights of the 2.7 million Bay Area customers who rely on [the city’s] water system,” a spokesperson for the city attorney’s office said last year.

Environmental leaders disagree with that claim. “To suggest the Bay-Delta Plan would somehow cause hardships for San Franciscans doesn’t ring true,” said Sejal Choksi-Chugh, the executive director of San Francisco Baykeeper. “I’m fairly certain most San Franciscans would choose to protect our beautiful bay over the interests of industrial agriculture. When it comes to water conservation, San Francisco’s city government needs...to catch up with cities like Los Angeles that require everyone who uses water to enact conservation measures—ratepayers and industrial clients alike.”

So far, though, San Francisco appears determined to prevent the updated protections for its namesake waterway. Instead of complying with new regulations, the city and its allies in the agriculture industry hope to persuade state officials to allow them to hammer out a series of less-stringent voluntary agreements governing diversions from the San Francisco Bay delta and its watershed. These groups say they seek a compromise that will protect fish while preserving access to plentiful drinking water supplies. But many conservation groups, including Defenders of Wildlife and the Environmental Defense Fund, have expressed deep concern about this so-called compromise.

The water stops here: The Shasta Dam, one of the tallest in the United States, is a centerpiece of the Central Valley Project.

An entire ecosystem is unraveling bit by bit before our eyes. Northern California is a microcosm of the global diversity crisis.

The voluntary agreements “will not adequately improve conditions in the Bay-Delta estuary and its Central Valley watershed,” members of the conservation community wrote in a September 2019 letter to Governor Gavin Newsom, whose administration is presiding over the matter. “Furthermore, the ongoing process is flawed and not on course to produce an agreement that is legally, scientifically, and biologically adequate to survive environmental review and legal challenge.”

Despite these warnings, Newsom’s administration seems keen to move forward with the process. Along with influential figures like Feinstein, the governor has praised the voluntary agreement negotiations, calling them “a path forward” that will “move past the old water binaries and set us up for a secure and prosperous water future.” He declined to reappoint Felicia Marcus as chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board, despite (or perhaps because of) her critical role in developing the Bay-Delta Plan update. And while he has pledged to double the state’s salmon population by 2050, environmentalists are increasingly displeased with his approach to the bay and its watershed. Newsom “is ignoring science and looking to cut deals” with the big water users, said Restore the Delta’s Barrigan-Parrilla.

City officials in San Francisco and their allies appear to be in no hurry to change the status quo. One key official was loath even to acknowledge the severity of the regional problems. When I asked Michael Carlin, the deputy general manager of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, whether he thought the salmon in the Tuolumne River were in good condition, he grew irritated. “No, I am not going to say whether they are in good condition or not in good condition,” he said as we sat in the headquarters of the commission, which oversees the city’s water supply and has been leading its opposition to the updated Bay-Delta Plan. “You are asking a very loaded question,” he added, “and a very unfair question, to tell you the truth.”

Fair question or not, the situation today in San Francisco Bay is troubling. It’s troubling for salmon and smelt, for orcas and seabirds, and for humans too. An entire ecosystem is unraveling bit by bit before our eyes. Northern California is a microcosm of the global biodiversity crisis. The threat of mass extinction isn’t just happening in far-off lands or confined to some distant future. It is happening in the United States, right now.

Peskin, speaking from his office in San Francisco’s City Hall, boiled the crisis down to its grim essence. “I don’t want to be the purveyor of doom and gloom,” he said, “but we are kind of fucked. Between sea level rise and changing weather patterns and fire becoming the new normal and fish die-offs and ecosystem collapse, it is really not a pretty picture.” ■

Ready for the country:
Nebraska farmers turned
this 80-acre cornfield
into a work of crop art to
show their support for
the Sierra Club's Ready
for 100 campaign.



ORGANIZING ON THE COASTS WON'T SAVE THE PLANET



Home on the range:
Cattlemen Randy
Thompson, an
unlikely face of the
battle against the
Keystone XL pipeline.

**Rural America has the
land, the people, and
the potential to flip the
political equation on
climate change.**

JANE FLEMING KLEEB

WHEN I GOT THE CALL FROM THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION back in 2010 asking me to help organize opposition to a large pipeline, I had never worked on climate change—or any environmental issue. All of my work up to that moment had been focused on helping kids learn to read, pushing back against insurance companies denying women access to treatment for eating disorders, and getting the Democratic Party to invest resources in the youth vote. I was an unlikely climate change advocate who was about to help organize an unlikely alliance of farmers, ranchers, tribal nations, and environmentalists to stop one of the riskiest and largest fossil fuel projects in the middle of America: the Keystone XL pipeline.

We did stop that pipeline—the Obama administration rejected it in 2015—but now we have to stop it again. The governments, corporations, and banks behind Keystone XL are trying to revive the project through billions of dollars in subsidies and regulatory rollbacks that, in this pandemic moment, only magnify the threat it poses to the people, land, and water along the proposed route. As my colleague Bill McKibben wrote, Keystone XL's backers are exploiting the distraction stemming from the pandemic "to do things they could not get away with at any other time."

The Keystone XL battle convinced me that we are at a moment in America and around the world where typical organizing is not enough anymore. Showing charts of scientific data will not save the planet. Sending e-mails, holding rallies, and tweeting will not save the planet. And organizing around climate change mostly on the coasts will not save the planet. Listening to the people on the front lines of the climate fight, especially those in red and rural communities, is absolutely what we need to do in every single state across our country.

For the past 30 years, national climate groups have focused their education, energy, and financial resources organizing in urban communities and mostly on the coasts. Their outreach has yielded amazing results—from shuttering coal plants in cities to blue-state governors signing historic climate change laws. Yet most of our fights against fracking, pipelines, and other fossil fuel infrastructure are happening in rural communities. The land needed to build out projects to provide the massive amounts of renewable energy we're going to need to kick our fossil fuel addiction is in rural communities. And the unlikely alliance we need to build for a true climate change movement is in rural communities.

Randy Thompson, a Nebraska cattleman, would never in a million years have thought that he would become one of the leading faces and voices of the Keystone XL fight. His parents worked for decades to earn enough money to purchase land of their own. Then one day a land agent with TransCanada, the company behind the pipeline, knocked on his mom's door and told her if she did not take the company's offer, that very day, TransCanada would seize her land through eminent domain and she would get nothing. That one door knock changed Randy's life forever, putting him on the front lines of what would become an international story and a true David and Goliath battle. Randy did not enter that fight because of the carbon the pipeline would carry. He entered the fight to protect his family, to protect the land, and to protect the water.

Most of us in Nebraska, myself included, did not get involved in stopping the Keystone XL pipeline because of climate change. But through the relationships we formed with environmental groups, we started to edu-

cate ourselves about the climate implications of tar sands and pipelines. Not once did McKibben, the cofounder of 350.org, or Tiernan Sittenfeld, the political director for the League of Conservation Voters, tell us we were not welcome at the table because we came to the fight to protect property rights and water. Instead, they changed their messaging to include us, and we in turn changed ours to also talk about the real consequences of climate change to our crops and homes.

In my book, *Harvest the Vote: How Democrats Can Win Again in Rural America*, I go into great detail about how we formed an unlikely alliance to stop the Keystone XL pipeline and where we can go from here to build a true movement of activists to stop climate change. We organized creative actions, from an 80-acre work of crop art asking President Obama to side with the heartland over the pipeline to carving messages into pumpkins as a fun way to educate the public about the risks of tar sand oil. As one of the leaders, I spent a tremendous amount of time visiting farmers, ranchers, and Indigenous allies. My friend Frank LaMere, a Winnebago leader we lost last year, told me early on in the fight that the only way we can organize to win is if we "collect road dust." What he meant was that we need to go where the people are—and the people who would stop the Keystone XL pipeline were in rural communities, both Native and non-Native. They rose up to the moment they were all called to lead because we organized together with creativity and a strong sense of place.

I'm not a policy-maker, but I do have a unique perspective from my involvement in the fight against the Keystone XL pipeline, my work as an organizer, and my personal life as a neighbor in rural America who listens to what folks are saying. Organizing in rural communities is critical if we are serious about not only passing a Green New Deal but also, more important, implementing the ideas behind that policy framework. Senator Jon Tester, a moderate Democrat from Montana, will make the Green New Deal stronger with his ideas. Conversations between Tester and progressive champion Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will result in rural America counting just as much as our coastal cities. He can explain how farmers already confront climate change with cover crops, water sensors, rotational grazing, and other regenerative

Most of us in Nebraska, myself included, did not get involved in the Keystone XL pipeline fight because of climate change.

Winnebago leader: Frank LaMere said the only way progressive activists can win is if they "collect road dust."



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agricultural practices. She can bring to the discussion the increased risks of asthma from polluting coal plants near communities of color. These conversations will result in unlikely alliances that will change climate conversations and change the face of what a climate justice movement looks and sounds like.

AS PROGRESSIVES, WE SPEND A LOT OF TIME talking about a just transition, yet the majority of the climate movement spends little time in rural communities listening and learning about what justice looks like for people—including tribal nations, farmers, fisherfolk, and people of color—who live and work in our small towns. If we are serious about climate justice, then including rural voices and ideas at the table, from the beginning, must start to happen.

Rural communities have the land needed to grow and build solar, wind, biofuel, and other renewable energy sources. You will continue to see massive opposition to these large-scale projects because rural communities have not been included in the plans and discussions about the best places to build or the fairest way to structure profit sharing for those communities that will bear the burden of the construction. From most climate advocates who live on the coasts, I often hear, “Windmills are so beautiful. Why would anyone object to building them?” It is easy to say that if you do not live under a 300-turbine wind farm. It is easy to say that if a share of the profits hadn’t been denied to all the residents of your community—and given instead only to those who own the land where the windmills were built.

Maybe it would be easier if we could just close a coal plant and build more wind and solar projects to power our communities, and that would be the end of that story. But there are people, families, money, and land involved, so it is not that easy. Our country has allowed big corporations to control the type of energy produced and where it is produced and who it is sold to. We’ve been told we do not get a say in the process because when we flip on a light switch to power our homes, ener-

Unlikely alliance:

The fight to protect Nebraska’s land and water brought together tribal nations, ranchers, farmers, and environmentalists.

“Showing up is the foundation to building the house. If you don’t start there, you are screwed.”

—Senator Jon Tester

Lean on us: Rural people and tribal nations have the land and the votes to make climate action a reality.



gy is there, and it is reliable, so we should remain quiet and happy. The energy system worked for us for decades, but now the entire equation has to be flipped because we know the devastation climate change brings to our communities with continued fossil fuel development.

Senator Bernie Sanders, when asked about climate change in 2017 by a coal worker, nailed the response. He made it clear he believed in the reality of climate change, acknowledged that coal jobs had been declining since the 1970s, and then looked at the young miner and said, “I don’t hold this gentleman and the coal miners responsible for climate change. In fact, these guys are heroes. I grew up in a rent-controlled apartment, and I will never forget the piles of coal that kept my house warm.”

Sanders went on to describe how our nation must honor the pensions the coal miners earned; he talked about the need to reinvest money in communities devastated by climate change. We can acknowledge the hard work, not leave anyone behind, and make it clear where we stand on the changes we must make now. We can build out massive new and necessary clean energy projects with the people who live on, love, and work the land—working for climate justice while working to confront climate change.

Organizing in rural communities is not easy. You can’t just parachute an organizer in thinking that magic—or anything—will happen quickly. We have to move beyond theories of change and get to the work of old-fashioned actions that build trust and power at the local level. Part of that organizing is showing up and being ready to stand with rural people when they are hurting, listening to the ideas they have to solve the challenges we face. We do not have to change our values or platform to win back rural voters; instead, we need to stand with them as family farms are flooded and their land is being taken through eminent domain to build pipelines.

When I interviewed Tester, the only working farmer in the US Senate, for my book, he said, “Showing up is the foundation to building the house. If you don’t start there, you are screwed. If you are an attorney from Manhattan, then don’t pretend you are a backhoe operator from Indiana. Don’t change who you are. Just come to where we are.”

Showing up for rural communities is the foundation of winning back not only the White House but also the Senate. Unless we start to elect Democrats again from

so-called red states, everything we care about and are pushing for will be blocked in the Senate. Which means we won’t be able to fix gerrymandering. We can’t get rid of big money in politics. We don’t get student debt forgiveness. We don’t get fairness in voting rights. We don’t get LGBTQ workplace protections. Simply put, we cannot win back the Senate without rural voters. And we don’t win back rural voters without organizing and funding the groups and candidates on the ground.

Consider this when thinking

about why we should be funding red state organizing and rural candidates: The US population is moving to fewer, mostly coastal states. By 2040, the majority of Americans will live in just eight states. But because the Constitution gives each state two senators, more and more power will be concentrated in less populous, mostly rural states. In fact, just 30 percent of Americans will elect 70 percent of the Senate. The rural states won't just control the majority of the Senate; they will also have the majority of governors' seats and state legislative seats, which in our federal system decide on everything from climate change to health care across the country. If you think focusing on President Trump is the answer, think again.

If we want structural change, we need to focus on the architecture of the political machine. This means we need to organize and pour money into groups on the ground so we can begin to earn the trust of rural voters again. Otherwise, we are ceding power to right-wing politicians who figured out this equation decades ago.

Funding the groups and candidates who are organizing in our rural communities should be near the top of the list for anyone who cares about climate change. In Nebraska we created a block captain program in which over 650 volunteers are assigned 50 voters in their neighborhoods. The block captains talk to their neighbors three times during the election cycle, helping them complete vote-by-mail applications and learn about the Democratic candidates.

In 2018 over 850 Democrats were on the ballot in Nebraska, and 73 percent of them won their elections. We did not win any of the statewide or federal seats. But we did take control of various county boards, mayor's offices, and state legislative seats, resulting in, to cite one climate change example, denial of a permit that Costco wanted to build a massive industrial agriculture operation in Lancaster County. This is how we organize and build power. When we earn the trust of voters, when we show them we can govern and protect their interests over those of big corporations, that is when we can start winning statewide again. We meet people where they are, and we acknowledge where we have differences and where we have common ground. We build together.

Energy and climate change are at the very heart of how our country will move forward. Unlikely alliances among tribal nations, farmers, ranchers, and environmentalists—like the ones that developed during the Keystone XL campaign—can be a model for how to shape legislation and the necessary steps to effectively organize so our country can truly address climate change.

Our kids and grandkids are depending on us to get this right. If we put people at the center, we can create an energy system that is fair and that is not killing the planet. If we invest in rural organizing, we can start to elect candidates, from state legislatures to the US Senate, who understand and prioritize climate action and climate justice. Or we can allow big corporations to keep lining the pockets of politicians who have a spine when campaigning but forget who elected them once in office.

America should be leading the way to create an entirely new energy infrastructure. The only way we can do this is to bring rural people and tribal nations to the table. They have the land. They also will increasingly have the votes to approve or block the laws needed to spur clean energy and climate action. Either we respect this or we keep spinning our wheels with white papers and fancy terms like "just transition"—when we could be organizing and putting power back in the hands of the people. ■

Jane Fleming Kleeb is the author of Harvest the Vote: How Democrats Can Win Again in Rural America. Since December 2016, she has served as chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party.

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WELL-FOUNDED

JOHN WASHINGTON



Seeking safety: Arnovis and his daughter, Meybelin, in the rear of the raft, cross the Rio Grande toward Hidalgo, Texas, to seek asylum in 2018. This photo was taken by a coyote as proof of life.

FEAR

A story of asylum.

Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico

FOURTEEN MEN WERE SLUMPED ON MATTRESSES and chairs, smoking inside the warehouse, watching over the migrants. One of the men had a pistol tucked into his waistband; another had a pistol resting on his lap. The men were fussing with their phones, ribbing each other, killing the morning. A slight waft of marijuana smoke lingered in the air. Someone hocked noisily, spat.

Arnovis, a thin, strong, hard-gazing 24-year-old Salvadoran man, nonchalantly grabbed his black knockoff Puma backpack—the one his mother had bought for him back in Jiquilisco—wove through the maze of sitting and slumped bodies, and walked out onto the patio.

Hey, *vato*, where you going? one of the men called. Just to shower, Arnovis said. That OK?

And your backpack?

My clothes.

The shower was a five-gallon paint bucket filled with water, a plastic bowl floating on the surface. It was set next to a tall concrete wall. A few wires crisscrossed the sky above the patio. A couple of the 14 coyotes—Arnovis had counted them—could see him through a large window. He grabbed the bucket and hauled it over to the door, where he plugged a coiled heating rod into an outlet, ran it back outside, and dropped it into the bucket. He stepped out again and, as the water began to warm, scanned the yard. The walls were high—definitely higher than he could jump. The branch of a mango tree growing on the other side of the wall dipped down far enough that he might be able to reach it. But he wasn't sure if it would hold his weight.

That branch, he thought, my only hope.

THE BASIC IDEA OF ASYLUM IS SIMPLE: SOMEONE COMES to your door because they are in danger, because they are afraid. You open your door, and you share your roof. But within this simple idea lies a labyrinth constructed of different sorts of fear. Some fear is grounded in immediate physical danger, some is diffused in general conditions of oppression; some is exaggerated, some completely imagined. Some fears are unrealized, some send you to your grave.

As a legal construct, asylum is less simple. According to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, which set the original international standard for defining refugees and asylum seekers, an asylum seeker is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to

such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Fear is the requisite for asylum, but the definition is based on a fear of a specific entity, the state, and a fear of being persecuted by the state or its representatives. Many of today's asylum seekers, especially those from Central America and Mexico (which, taken together, account for most of the people seeking asylum in the United States), are fleeing non-state persecutors. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status, “in general, the applicant's fear should be considered well founded if he can establish, to a reasonable degree, that his continued stay in his country of origin has become intolerable to him.”

The US Supreme Court also wrestled with the definition of well-founded fear after Congress adopted the language of the Refugee Convention into law with the 1980 Refugee Act. During the oral arguments for a 1987 case, *Immigration and Naturalization Service v. Cardoza-Fonseca*, in which a Nicaraguan woman who overstayed her visa appealed to the United States for asylum, attorney Dana Leigh Marks suggested defining such fear according to the “reasonable person” standard: Would a reasonable person in this same factual situation fear persecution upon return to their country? But the justices sought a more quantifiable criterion than reasonableness—they tried to pin down the quivering subjectivity of fear. In his majority opinion Justice John Paul Stevens wrote, “One can certainly have a well-founded fear of an event happening when there is less than a 50 percent chance of the occurrence taking place.”

Justice Harry Blackmun argued in a concurring opinion that “the very language of the term ‘well-founded fear’ demands a particular type of analysis—an examination of the subjective feelings of an applicant for asylum coupled with an inquiry into the objective nature of the articulated reasons for the fear.”

Justice Antonin Scalia tried throwing out a few examples, and here he and Marks, still in the oral argument,

When you feel it, nothing could be more lucid than fear—more consuming, more convincing, more instant.

No choice: As the US increasingly militarizes its southern border, those fleeing unlivable conditions are forced to take ever more desperate and dangerous routes.



engage in some frightful repartee.

SCALIA: Let's assume that the persecution in the country you're talking about is very...it's horrible persecution, it's torture; it isn't just incarceration.... Now, suppose my chances of actually being subjected to that if I go back are one in a thousand. Would I have a well-founded fear of going back?

MARKS: It depends on whether it would be reasonable to have that fear in view of the small chance that something is going to happen.

SCALIA: I know it would, and what's the answer?

MARKS: The answer is that the trier of fact should look at the specific facts which you put forth to show the objective situation.

SCALIA: You see, I don't know the answer to that. Is that a well-founded fear or not?

MARKS: One in a thousand, I'm sure it's not.

In 1986, Marks was a 32-year-old immigration attorney presenting her first case before the Supreme Court. Today she is an immigration judge and president emerita of the National Association of Immigration Judges. When I spoke with her in 2018, 32 years after she had argued *Cardoza-Fonseca*, she told me she had been heavily counseled to avoid any attempt at quantification and that Scalia had "backed her into a numerical corner." Stevens finally settled on what has become an unofficial 10 percent standard: If an asylum applicant has at least a 10 percent chance of "being shot, tortured, or otherwise persecuted," they meet the requirements for being eligible for protection.

What we are left with: To be well founded, fear should be "subjectively genuine and objectively reasonable" and can be based on a one in 10 probability of occurrence. The legal grappling with this complex structure of an emotion hasn't exactly made matters clearer. And yet, when you feel it, nothing could be more lucid than fear—more all-consuming, more convincing, more instant.



Rights for the rightless: The signing of the UN Refugee Convention in Geneva in 1951.

His future rushed at him like an oncoming train. A crescendo and then—not boom but silence, death.

No entry: Under new US protocols, asylum seekers who make it to the country are returned to Mexico to languish in shelters or on the street until their cases are heard.

ARNOVIS'S BROTHER, LIVING IN A suburb of Kansas City, had wired money to the wrong coyote, a man named Gustavo. Well, his brother didn't wire the money; his brother's friend did. His brother doesn't have papers and couldn't send the money on his own, which may have been why there was a mix-up. Gustavo—the wrong coyote—got \$700 for doing nothing, and he didn't see any good reason to give it back. The problem—and for Arnovis it was a life-and-death problem—was that the family didn't have any more money. After a

deportation to El Salvador from Mexico a few weeks earlier and a down payment on the \$6,000 smuggling fee—the family sold a prized goat for 200 bucks to help pay for the first trip—there was nothing left.

El Suri—the coyote who did not get the money—was the guy actually planning to take Arnovis across the border. The two of them had hit it off, joking around on the migrant trails; earlier, El Suri had even suggested Arnovis stay in Mexico and work with him. Arnovis got along with everyone. He liked to tell jokes to quell tension and rarely complained—that is, he was just being himself and wasn't angling for a job in human smuggling. Maybe if it was just between El Suri and Arnovis, they could have worked something out. But El Suri had a boss. The boss wanted his money.

As El Suri made a couple of calls, Arnovis hovered nervously. He remembers one call on speakerphone. Someone was trying to convince El Suri to head back south to take the next load. I'm waiting, El Suri said, for this one last kid to pay up. We're trying to get his brother to wire us. The man on the other end suggested El Suri chop off one of Arnovis's fingers and send it to his brother. Yeah, maybe.

El Suri hung up. Arnovis leaned against the warehouse wall. He felt his future rushing at him like an oncoming train. A crescendo and then—not boom but silence, death.

TODAY, THERE ARE TWO PATHS BY WHICH SOMEONE CAN gain refugee status in the United States—as a refugee or an asylee. Refugees apply from a country they have temporarily escaped to or from their own country, which must be of "special humanitarian concern" to the State Department. There are numerical limits, per region, on the number of refugees admitted each year. The 2018 ceiling for refugees from all of Latin America and the Caribbean was 1,500 people. But that was the ceiling; the actual number of refugees granted protection from all of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2018 was less than 1,000. Overall, in the same year, 22,405 refugees were resettled in the United States, and that number took another nosedive in 2019, with the 2020 ceiling set at 18,000, the lowest ever. White House officials have also reportedly considered shutting down the program altogether. In 1980, the total number of refugee admissions into the US—the majority from East Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, as well as the Soviet



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Union—was over 200,000.

For asylees, meanwhile, there are no numerical limits. Asylees apply once they're in the United States or when they show up at a port of entry. As the ceiling for refugees collapses—and as the other pathways to immigration are foreclosed—more and more people fleeing danger are making their way to the US and asking for protection through the asylum process. In 2017, 331,700 people applied for asylum in the United States, the most of any year so far this decade—almost twice as many as in 2015, and roughly six times as many as in 2010. Just over 30,000 cases were decided, however, meaning the backlog of pending cases is rising sharply. Worldwide, there were 837,478 asylum seekers in 2010, according to the UNHCR. By 2018, that number topped 3.5 million.

IT ALL STARTED ON A SOCCER FIELD IN 2016. ARNOVIS accidentally knocked his elbow into the mouth of the brother of a gang leader in Corral de Mulas, a small town on El Salvador's southern peninsula. One gang tried to get revenge, a rival gang offered him "protection" as the situation rapidly escalated. He received death threats, and his brother-in-law—whom gang members had mistaken for Arnovis—had a machete wielded over his neck. Arnovis's life had become unlivable, and there was no resolution or safety except in flight. You're dead, they told him. *Sos tumba*. It was either submit to his grave at home or take wing. Even if he tried to stay and somehow dodged the multiple threats, he was putting his family at risk, especially his young daughter.

And so, he fled: a months-long journey through Guatemala and Mexico, riding on top of trains, surviving cold and hunger and detention and robbery and the constant, nagging, needling fear that finally brought him here, to a coyote safe house across the border from Texas.

After another call, El Suri explained the situation: I got no problem with you, man. You're only 200 bucks to me. But the jefe, El Suri said, he doesn't fuck around. He wants your money by 10 tomorrow morning, and if you don't have it by then, he's going to come by, and what he's going to do—he's going to cut you into pieces.

Arnovis nodded, trying to take it in, trying to think. Trying to get out of the way of the oncoming train.

No money, and he was dead. That simple.

After a while El Suri called Arnovis's brother again, trying to convince him to drum up the money.

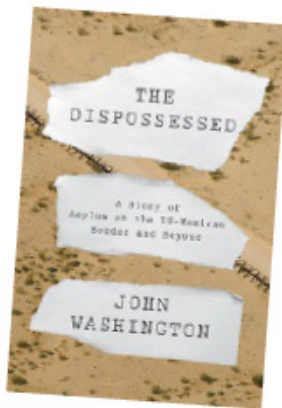
If you don't send \$300, we're going to have to take care of your brother.

There were about 75 people crashed, sprawled, and breathing on the open warehouse floor. Arnovis found an open spot and slumped down. After a while he tried calling his brother again but couldn't get through. Then he tried Gustavo, the coyote who'd pocketed the money for doing nothing. Surprisingly, he answered.



Rough routes:
Aboard "the Beast," the system of freight trains that migrants use to get free but dangerous and sometimes deadly rides north.

If they told you they were going to hack you into pieces, you better pay, or find a way to get out of there. These people don't fuck around.



John Washington is a writer and award-winning translator based in New York City.

This excerpt is adapted from The Dispossessed: A Story of Asylum at the US-Mexican Border and Beyond (Verso, 2020).

Gustavo! Arnovis said, and explained the situation. It was all a mistake. He was going to be hacked into pieces if he didn't pay his coyote tomorrow, and they had meant to wire El Suri but had accidentally sent the money to him, so if he could just return it....

I don't have it, Gustavo said.

What do you mean, you don't have it?

I don't have it.

The \$700 my brother wired you?

Yeah, don't have it anymore. And just a word of advice, Gustavo added. If they told you they were going to hack you into pieces, you better pay, or find a way to get out of there. And then he said something Arnovis already knew: These people don't fuck around.

TO LAY BARE THE POLITICAL NATURE OF ASYLUM PROTECTIONS: During the 1980s the United States took in Cubans and Nicaraguans (fleeing communist governments that the US openly opposed) but summarily denied Haitians, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans (fleeing US-backed authoritarian governments). In 1987, Nicaraguans were granted asylum at a rate of 84 percent. Meanwhile, for both Salvadorans and Guatemalans the approval rate throughout the 1980s hovered between 1 and 3 percent. A 1982 Immigration and Naturalization Service memorandum revealed the government's flagrantly discriminatory interpretation of the 1980 Refugee Act and the 1951 Refugee Convention: "Different criteria sometimes may be applied to different nationalities.... In some cases, different levels of proof are required of different asylum applicants."

Asylum policy has remained both grimly discriminatory and starkly political. The United States denies almost 90 percent of Mexican claims, while granting over 80 percent of claims from Eritreans—a gaping and irreconcilable disparity. In part, the difference owes to the mutual economic dependency between the United States and Mexico. It would be a diplomatic sucker punch for the US to openly acknowledge that Mexico either persecutes or cannot protect its own citizens, but it has no problem making that same assessment about Eritrea.

Although terrorism has replaced the specter of communism, it is still largely fear—the nation's—that drives hard-line immigration, asylum, and refugee policies. We codify the nation's fears into law, yet we delegitimize the

fears of our neighbors, the fears of refugees and asylum seekers—many of whom are fleeing not the abstract, future-oriented fear of possible demographic change, “replacement,” or improbable violence but actual, immediate, duck-for-cover, jackboots-kicking-at-your-door, the-roof-is-collapsing fear.

ARNOVIS WENT BACK TO EL SURI. HE TOLD HIM HE’D WORK FOR HIM, DO whatever he wanted. El Suri told him that was great. Terrific. He’d be glad to have him.

But he still needed to pay.

He had 12 hours to figure a way out. That night was long, the floor hard and cold. Arnovis sat in a daze, hugging his knees, listening to the snores and moans of his fellow migrants crowding the open floor. It was like they were in a mass grave, but still alive. In his anguish, he still felt hope; he still rejected the fact that his final truth would come to him the next morning: that train, then silence.

In the morning, walking out to take a shower on the cold patio under the watchful eye of the 14 coyotes, he found his salvation: a tree branch.

If he could reach it, and if it didn’t break, he could pull himself up to the top of the wall, grab on, and—maybe—get over. He didn’t know what was on the other side, but it was almost certainly better than what was on this side.

After plugging in the water heater and looking up at the mango branch for another moment, he walked over to it and jumped.

THE MARROW OF CIVILIZATION, THOMAS HOBBS REASONED, is not mutual interest but rather mutual fear. We are frightened of each other, and so we draw each other close, establish rules of engagement: politics. You intuit the need to protect yourself, but you need to rationalize, or legislate, the need to protect your neighbor. In submitting our authority of self-protection to the state, we expect protection not only for ourselves, but for and with our compatriots. In other words, we are all safer if we are all safe.

But demarcating who is given room under the wing of the Leviathan has been an ongoing controversy that has, in part, sparked conflict, conquest, and holocaust. It has also spurred the development of institutionalized state protections, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Refugee Convention, that today—at least on paper—extend rights and protection to every single human being on the planet. Sovereignty needs steel and

Sovereignty needs steel and statecraft; the extension of rights and protections needs incubation and cultural shifts.

Back home: Arnovis holding Meybelín in the family’s kitchen in El Salvador in 2018.

statecraft; the extension of rights and protections needs incubation and cultural shifts. According to the “contact hypothesis,” the best way to counteract prejudice—to diminish fear—between majority and minority groups, between residents and newcomers, is by integration and patience. Fear typically prompts the opposite of patience. As Corey Robin writes, “What makes fear such a source of political élan is either the memory or the expectation of political entropy.” Nothing signifies political entropy more than—you can almost hear an Ennio Morricone theme—a stranger coming to town.

Two countervailing fears leave asylum seekers outside any state protections: the instigating fear that pushes people to flee their country, and the receiving population’s fear that propels them to slam the door. What results is a global crisis of homelessness: millions of people left in the cold of statelessness. To be stateless, as Hannah Arendt cogently observed, is to be rightless. Since the origin of human rights in the late 18th century, laws and protections have been hitched closely to the state. That is, if you fall or are pushed out from under its wing, you fall into a political abyss.

I first met Arnovis in the summer of 2018, just as the family separation crisis, in which the US government was tearing thousands of children from their parents after they crossed the border in search of asylum, was gaining international attention and condemnation. It was about six months after he had been trapped and threatened in the Piedras Negras safe house. At his home in the small town of Corral de Mulas on the rural coast of El Salvador, I interviewed him for this magazine. I would return to his home multiple times over the next year, staying and living with the family.

At that point, when I first met him, he had been deported twice from the United States and once from Mexico. He had spent months in detention, months on the migrant trails, and had had his 6-year-old daughter, Meybelín, taken away by US agents and sent to an undisclosed location. It was just a few weeks after Meybelín had been shipped back to him, and he and his family were in a state of extended shock, starting to pick up the pieces of their lives, assessing the damage. And he wasn’t even free yet. He was home, but the threats he had thrice tried to flee were still present, and he and his family were living in a state of constant fear and anxiety.

BACK IN PIEDRAS NEGRAS, THE MANGO BRANCH HELD. Arnovis reached up with his other hand and clutched the next branch, planting his feet against the concrete wall. In another heave he had a hold on the top edge. He braced his feet, yanked himself up, and then swung a leg over the wall. That was when he heard one of the coyotes. What the fuck!

This fucking *vato*! another shrieked.

Arnovis looked down the other side of the wall and saw a few dozen kids in uniforms crossing the patio of a school. The mango tree was too far for him to reach the trunk and shinny down. There was nothing to do but fall onto the hard concrete in his black hand-me-down dress shoes.

Arnovis didn’t hesitate. He didn’t have time. He didn’t even jump. He just let go.



Books & the Arts



THE GOOD OF ALL

Lorraine Hansberry's radical imagination

by ELIAS RODRIQUES

In October of 1964, three months after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Lorraine Hansberry's play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* opened on Broadway. At the time, Hansberry was already famous for *A Raisin in the Sun*, but the intervening years had not been kind. Shingles racked her body, and she'd been diagnosed with cancer. Weakened by the disease, she moved into a hotel next to the theater so she'd

be closer to the rehearsals. The singer Nina Simone went to visit her there, and she recalled Hansberry saying, "I must get well. I must go down to the South." Even with her play in production and cancer killing her, she hoped to join the civil rights protests that had engulfed the South and "find out what kind of revolutionary" she was.

Most people these days know Hansberry for *A Raisin in the Sun*, a play that took housing segregation as its subject. But as Imani Perry chronicles in her new biography, *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine*

Hansberry, the revolutionary Hansberry has long been hidden in plain sight. *A Raisin in the Sun* is often understood as the story of a black family fighting racist housing discrimination to purchase a home in a white neighborhood. Yet Hansberry always insisted that the play was not simply about black people's right to spend their money freely. It was also a critique of employment discrimination, Northern white racism, and American poverty. Hansberry's death in 1965, at the age of 34, curtailed her work's more radical, materialist, and socialist analyses. Later liberal histories of the civil

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rights era would likewise narrow the scope of a movement that was opposed not only to segregation and disenfranchisement but also to the inequalities and violence that capitalism and liberalism produced—a set of concerns central to Hansberry's oeuvre.

Consulting her unpublished writings and diaries as well as her published work, Perry recovers this more radical side. Although raised in an elite milieu in Chicago, Hansberry was every bit as committed, from an early age, to undoing the injustices that enabled that culture as she was invested in decrying poor housing conditions. As she grew older, these commitments manifested themselves in an increasingly radical politics. Amid the rabid anticommunism of the 1950s, she risked getting blacklisted by advocating for socialism, both at home and in the still decolonizing world, because she believed that freedom from racism also required global freedom from capitalism. After *Raisin's* success made her a de facto spokesperson on African American politics, she openly criticized black leaders who neglected the poor to advance their own careers.

Black freedom, for Hansberry, required amplifying the voices of the black working class. At times, this commitment caused her to focus more on politics than on her art, and at times it put her at odds with her less radical peers. Yet, as Perry shows, Hansberry was hard to pin down. "Though she was an internationalist, and something of a Black nationalist, a Marxist, and a socialist, she was also deeply American." Her critique of capitalist and racist America stemmed from a deep attachment to the culture and people who felt its violence. Her investment in American politics did not lead to a simplistic patriotism or a belief in American exceptionalism but rather to a desire to see her country realize its (not unique) democratic potential. Hansberry, in this way, was deeply committed to the United States, wanting to make it a more equitable and humane force—for women, for black people, for queer people, and for colonized people across the globe.

Hansberry was born in Chicago in 1930, to parents whose wealth and social status helped buffer their family in her early years from the full brunt of the Depression. Her mother, Nannie Hansberry, was a teacher and a representative in local politics. Her father, Carl Hansberry, made enough money in the real estate business, providing housing for poor black Chicagoans, to send Lor-

Looking for Lorraine

The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry

By Imani Perry

Beacon Press. 236 pp. \$26.95

raine to school in a fur coat (where her poorer classmates beat her up). Because the small number of people in the black elite were politically diverse, many of the family friends who visited her childhood home were socialists or radicals of various kinds. The Hansberrys lived above Ray Hansborough, a member of the Communist Party and secretary of the National Negro Commission, and Carl Hansberry worked with Truman Gibson Sr., the executive director of the American Negro Exposition, a kind of African American World's Fair. In time, Lorraine Hansberry's politics would resemble less her parents' than their friends'.

The influence of her parents' social network, combined with her early exposure to racism, helped radicalize Hansberry when she was still young. In 1937, when she was 7, the family moved into a home in Washington Park, a white neighborhood, where angry white mobs gathered in the hopes of forcing them out. Around the same time, a segregationist landowners' association challenged the sale. Suspecting he might one day need legal support, Carl Hansberry had already reached out to the NAACP to take the segregationists to court, which the organization proceeded to do. While he was away fighting for their legal right to remain in their new home, Nannie Hansberry stayed up in the evenings with a pistol to protect their children. Though Carl Hansberry ultimately prevailed in a Supreme Court case, *Hansberry v. Lee*, in 1940, his daughter's experience in Washington Park taught her that wealth and the legal system provided no guaranteed security against racism.

While Lorraine Hansberry's early life exposed her to the difficulties that black people had appealing to the state for protection, her education gave her hope for a different kind of society. In 1947, when she was 17, white students at her high school went on strike to protest the increasing number of black students there. As she recounted in *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, the black students from a nearby school, "the children of the Unqualified Oppressed," came "pouring out of the bowels of the ghetto" to demonstrate. The mayor and the school board intervened, and the police dispersed the striking white students. In Hansberry's eyes, the victory showed that

change came from below: Working-class people were central agents when it came to ameliorating black suffering.

In 1948, Hansberry left Chicago for the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she began to tie her interest in the politics of poor black people to a growing interest in art. Reading the work of the Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey and then studying in Ajijic, Mexico, with the Guatemalan painter Carlos Mérida and others, she was introduced to an art that aimed at representing the global working class, those colonized people around the world who were being exploited in similar ways as black people in the United States.

Hansberry's budding interest in art took her to New York in 1950. There she published her first poem, "Flag From a Kitchenette Window," which depicts the American flag as seen through the window of a poor black person's apartment. In the poem's middle section, the hinge connecting racism at home and abroad appears in one perfect line: "Black boy in a window; Algiers and Salerno." While her life would undergo many changes in the coming years, the view from this window would remain her compass.

The next few years saw Hansberry's entry into black radical politics on the page and in the streets. In 1951 she moved to Harlem and began working for Paul Robeson's Marxist newspaper *Freedom*—"the journal of Negro liberation," in Hansberry's words. There she wrote about everything from Richard Wright's novel *The Outsider*, which she disliked, to Kwame Nkrumah's election as prime minister of Ghana, which she applauded. She also began taking and teaching classes at Marxist adult education centers alongside such famous black radicals as Claudia Jones, Alice Childress, and W.E.B. Du Bois. In March of 1952, when Robeson couldn't attend a conference in Uruguay because the United States had stripped him of his passport for being a communist, he sent Hansberry in his stead. She was not yet 22, but thanks to her writing and teaching, preeminent black Marxist intellectuals of an earlier generation looked to her to carry on their legacy.

That position made her marginal to many of her less radical peers in the civil rights movement, especially those who had turned away from the communist politics of the 1930s and '40s. In 1952, as the movement entered its pivotal years and *Brown v. Board of Education* went before the Supreme

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Court, Hansberry grew increasingly interested in what was happening abroad. In a letter to *Reporter* magazine, she declared her support for Jomo Kenyatta, an anti-colonial activist in Kenya arrested for his putative affiliation with the Mau Maus, a militant group that fought to expel the occupying British colonial forces. Her growing internationalism was motivated by her belief that the battle against racism must be fought on all fronts and that any progress on the home front was only a beginning: Colonialism and capitalism still needed to be uprooted.

In 1952, Hansberry began dating Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish graduate student at New York University, and married him the following year. Like her, he was a dedicated leftist; the day before their wedding, they protested the death sentence imposed on Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Politics dominated their family life as much as it did their public lives. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Hansberry identified as a lesbian, even though she remained married to Nemiroff. She joined the Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian organization, and wrote a letter to its publication arguing that sexism and anti-queer oppression sprang from the same source and that combating one required combating the other. Later in the decade, she continued this project by writing queer fiction un-

der the pseudonym Emily Jones. "She was a feminist, anticolonialist, and Marxist," Perry explains, "and her sexuality became an essential part of her thinking through human relations."

In 1959, Hansberry's life changed dramatically. *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted on Broadway—a feat never before accomplished by a black woman playwright—with a cast that included Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Claudia McNeil. But even more important was how the radical play was received: America's mainstream (and often conservative) theater critics applauded it. "One of the biggest selling points about *Raisin*," recalled Ossie Davis, who eventually replaced Poitier as Walter Lee Younger, "was how much the Younger family was just like any other American family."

The play's popular reception proved, over the years, to be a gift and a curse. The central arc of the story focuses on an inheritance. After Walter's father dies, his mother receives a life insurance payment and decides to purchase a home in a white neighborhood. Yet the Youngers are soon confronted by a representative of a segregationist homeowners' association, which offers to buy the house from them for more than they paid for it in order to keep them

from moving into the neighborhood. The play was a powerful indictment of American racism and segregation, but it also left room for both conservative and radical interpretations. Many audience members identified with the Youngers because they saw their conflict as quintessentially American: What could be more so than acquiring a home? But in doing so, audiences ignored how it was a uniquely black story about the ways the capitalist housing market limited black people's liberties.

While some chose to ignore the issues of race in the play, others ignored its none-too-subtle socialist politics. The play argued that white homeowners collaborated to use their wealth to enforce segregation and, where possible, dispossession. An FBI agent who watched the play as part of the bureau's surveillance of Hansberry, however, reported that *Raisin* "contains no comments of any nature about Communism as such" and instead focuses on "negro aspirations," as though one precluded the other. Everywhere she looked, people seemed to regard her as far less radical than she was.

Hansberry did all that she could to combat this misunderstanding. In 1960 she began working on *Les Blancs*, a play about three sons mourning their father's death as their country fights for independence.

A Lower Register Sweetness

What a privileged person I am
to be relieved to no end
and to have you back
putting me in my place.
Thank you for coming
along! Thank you for ordering me!
We're ending a crucial few
decades of prime thinking
and doing and conditioning
and humming along
with our able-bodied heads.
And now we're coop-flown
according to the actuarial

sciences. The future
is comprised of supervised
high adventures. Those are the matters
of fact weighing down
our stacked deck.
You prefer the drone
of being done
over being done over
and I'm lying down
with arms across my chest.
I can't do anything.
I can keep my mouth
open. I'm leveling my head

Les Blancs tells their story by examining the mixed legacy of their father, an anti-colonial fighter, as well as the brutal and paternalistic legacy of their country's colonizers. Through the play, Hansberry reminded her domestic audience that she was fundamentally anti-colonial in outlook and anything but an American liberal.

The following year, she was even more pointed in her criticism of both black and white paternalism in the United States. After the Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, African Americans across the nation protested. Ralph Bunche, then an undersecretary-general of the UN, called the protesters "misguided misfits." In response, Hansberry wrote a letter to *The New York Times*, arguing that "Negro leaders" who gained their position by telling "the white community exactly what the white community has made it clear it wishes to hear" shirk their duties to black people around the world. African American equality also required anti-colonial liberation.

Hansberry was often willing to criticize black elites in her pursuit of a more radical and egalitarian society, one that was socialist and feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, that would uplift working-

class people—and in particular, women—around the world. She recruited other artists to this capacious cause. The night Nina Simone debuted at Carnegie Hall, Hansberry called not to congratulate her but to discuss what she could do to aid the civil rights movement. "It was always Marx, Lenin and revolution—real girls' talk," Simone recalled of their friendship. Within two months, they were fundraising together. In addition to fundraising, Hansberry continued to critique the inclusion of a privileged few black people (including herself) while excluding voices from the black working class. At the 1963 Negro History Week program of the Liberation Committee for Africa, she gave a speech in which she insisted:

Fair and equal treatment for Ralph Bunche, Jackie Robinson and Harry Belafonte is not nearly enough. Tea parties at the White House for the few will not make up for 300 years of wrong to the many. The boat must be rocked for the good of all.

When "inclusion" meant an entrance into the unequal distribution of power and wealth—even when it meant her own material gain—Hansberry wanted no part of it. Instead, she wanted "the good of all."

As time went on, Hansberry grew increasingly frustrated by the special treatment accorded the black elite and began to believe that she could help poor black people only by giving them her platform. She followed through on this commitment in 1963. After the civil rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy invited Hansberry, James Baldwin, and other black intellectuals and activists to discuss the protests. During the meeting, Kennedy spoke to the more famous intellectuals, ignoring Jerome Smith, a founder of the New Orleans chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. This incensed Hansberry; according to Baldwin, she told Kennedy, "You have a great many very accomplished people in this room, Mr. Attorney General, but the only man you should be listening to is that man [Smith] over there." After a moment in which Kennedy sat absolutely still, staring at her, she added, "That is the voice of twenty-two million people." Afterward, Smith spoke about his work at some length.

As Hansberry interrogated her own position and those of other members of the black elite in the civil rights movement, she also began to question their commitment to nonviolence. At a forum hosted by the

with a disheveled table
and you are above me
and I need you to discuss
me by yourself
away from this place,
and with one of the biscuits
I made earlier, in your hand.
We've just had
the last civil disagreement.
There will be no others
on this property so long
as I'm the demand
of this house. The light

switches have a color
and they didn't before.
The drift we're getting
is exhausting,
unsightly. Heavenly
to have even a thin
space to settle
my affairs. And what
of yours?
Within arm's reach,
enough to live
for days.

JOSH KALSCHEUR

Association of Artists for Freedom called “The Black Revolution and the White Backlash,” she discussed the long history of racist repression and black resistance. “Since 1619, Negroes have tried every method of communication, of transformation of their situation from petition to the vote, everything,” she said. The time had come to consider violence as well as non-violence as a tool for social change. Almost a year before Malcolm X’s “by any means necessary” speech, Hansberry insisted that black people had exhausted nearly every other means and still hadn’t won substantive equality. In an essay from the year of Malcolm X’s speech, written for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s fundraising book *The Movement*, she again raised the question of whether nonviolence was enough. “Twenty million people began to ask with a new urgency,” she wrote, “IS nonviolence the way?”

For Hansberry, the failures of nonviolent protest not only were a matter of tactics but also reflected the intransigence of her generation—a theme she explored in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*. The play follows a white couple with radical tendencies and artistic inclinations living in the countercultural enclave of New York City’s Greenwich Village. As they struggle to reconcile their romantic tensions and achieve success as artists, they also have difficulty understanding the radical nature of the ’60s.

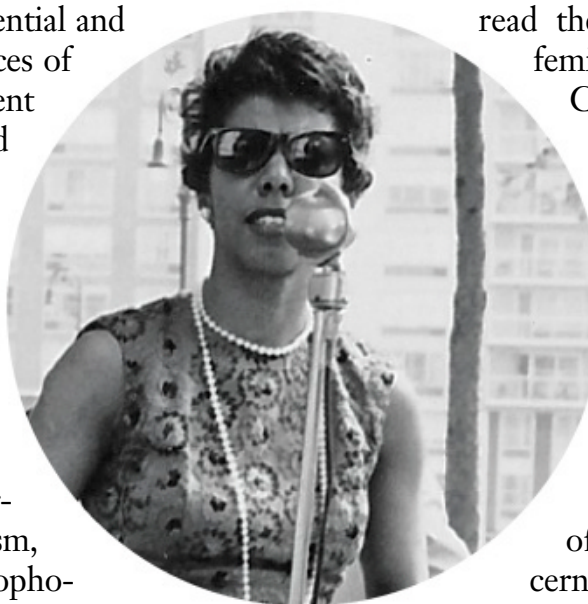
Hansberry wrote sympathetically of this couple; she shared with them a bohemian past in New York. But she was unreserved about what she felt were their cultural and political flaws, too. “The artistic and political grounds on which they had grown,” Perry explains, had left their “generation ill prepared for responding to the struggles for racial emancipation.” Liberal reformism was no longer adequate, nor was a countercultural avant-gardism. The very foundations of American democracy needed to be transformed. A profoundly pessimistic play in Perry’s reading, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* diagnoses the problem but fails to provide a solution.

Although Hansberry’s untimely death preempted her ability to explore the kinds of solutions that might create such a foundational transformation, her funeral provided a rallying cry for activists and artists in the generations to come. At the service, the civil rights organizer James Forman, a former high school classmate of hers, said that her life demonstrated the importance of acting on one’s beliefs. Baldwin, who couldn’t attend the service, sent a wire insisting that

“we” must not fail her. As Perry tells us, the mourners also included:

someone [who] risked his life to attend her funeral and milled about in the snow-covered crowd: Malcolm X. He was then in hiding and under constant death threats, yet frenetically trying to organize the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Like Lorraine, Malcolm was pursuing an anticolonial, internationalist model of freedom.... They both ran out of time. Three weeks after Lorraine’s funeral, on Nina [Simone]’s birthday, Malcolm was murdered.

By the second half of the 1960s, many of the most influential and increasingly radical voices of the civil rights movement were being extinguished prematurely. Helping to realize their aspirations would prove to be a task for others to take up. As Perry suggests, this work continues in the work of American leftists confronting the intertwining forces of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and American imperialism.



Perry’s *Looking for Lorraine* joins a growing body of histories and biographies seeking to recover the political traditions of the black radicals of the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s. As Alan Wald argues in *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War*, these figures have been neglected because the anti-communist hysteria of the mid-20th century “enforced forgetting” of the black and white leftists who were unsatisfied by the era’s liberalism and sought to better the conditions of the poor. Working against what Wald calls a “memory crisis,” Perry, as well as scholars like Mary Helen Washington and Lawrence Jackson, have demonstrated what has been omitted from the few histories of the left that were published, to say nothing of the liberal histories of the period. Black leftists, committed to socialist and anti-colonialist politics, not only persisted through the Cold War but also left a powerful legacy that can help us envision how to fight for anti-imperialism, socialism, and black liberation in the midst of counterrevolutionary times.

In *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945–1995*, Cheryl

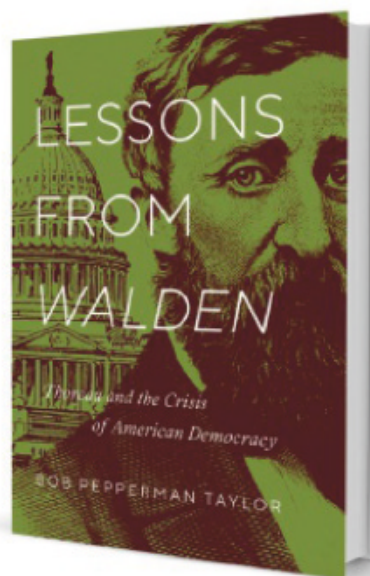
Higashida reminds us that “racism, patriarchy, and homophobia have combined potentially with anticommunism to marginalize and silence radical Black women within communities, social movements, academia, and U.S. society at large.” A new generation of scholars is helping us recover those traditions of radical egalitarianism that were often erased by anti-communist historiography.

Much of this work has been led by black left feminists such as Perry, Dayo Gore, and Carole Boyce Davies, who have helped sustain this rich tradition of black egalitarianism that combated sexism as well as racism and poverty. In their works, they remind us that black radical women read or otherwise

learned from one another. Angela Davis read the preeminent black left feminist of the postwar years, Claudia Jones. Maya Angelou admired the art of Hansberry and Abbey Lincoln. The Combahee River Collective’s identification with socialism was not surface-level or a departure from the norm but rather the result of a long history of black feminism’s concern with poverty, labor, and oppressive forms of governance.

Although Hansberry has often been incorporated into more liberal readings of the civil rights era, she remained committed to uprooting oppressive structures on a variety of fronts, like the other black left feminists of the era. She was a daughter of the black elite, but she believed working people were the agents for change and was committed to seeing the violence against them end. She was anti-imperialist but also an American. Had she lived longer, she would likely have been both a black power nationalist and an anti-colonial internationalist. As Perry deftly demonstrates, Hansberry occupied these seemingly contradictory positions because her concern for people’s suffering led her to take up a variety of positions, no matter how much they might appear, at first glance, to be in tension with one another. In this way, Hansberry remained true to her radical commitments even on her deathbed. She did not assume she knew all the answers, but she did want to see a less violent and more revolutionary world brought into existence. Hansberry never survived to see that world, but Perry’s recovery of her vision has made it all the more possible. ■

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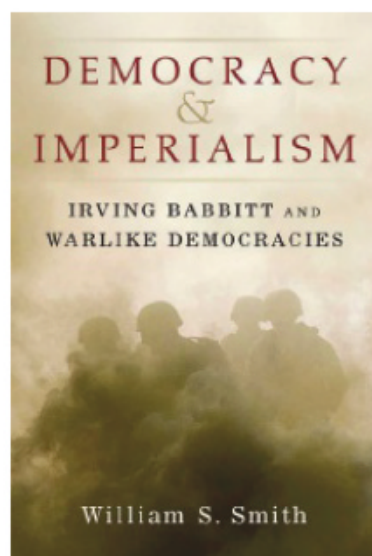
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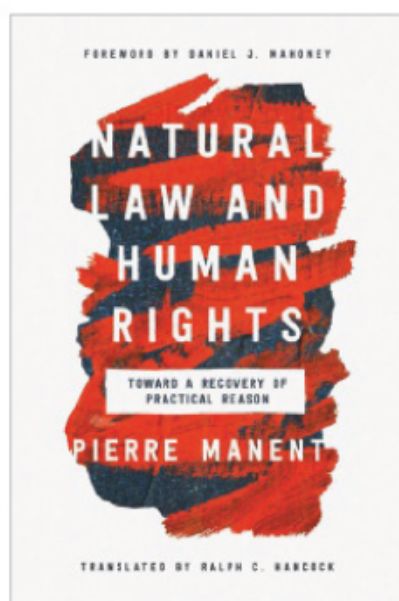
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Natural Law and Human Rights

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BY PIERRE MANENT

TRANSLATED BY RALPH C. HANCOCK

FOREWORD BY DANIEL J. MAHONEY

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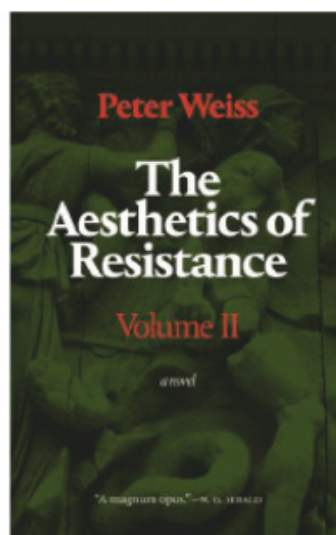
—Patrick Deneen, author of
Why Liberalism Failed

Pierre Manent is one of France's leading political philosophers. This first English translation of his profound and strikingly original book *La loi naturelle et les droits de l'homme* is a reflection on the central question of the Western political tradition.

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HARDCOVER



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A Novel

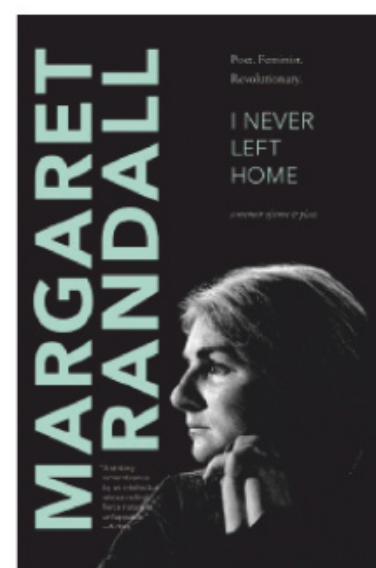
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Poet, Feminist, Revolutionary

BY MARGARET RANDALL

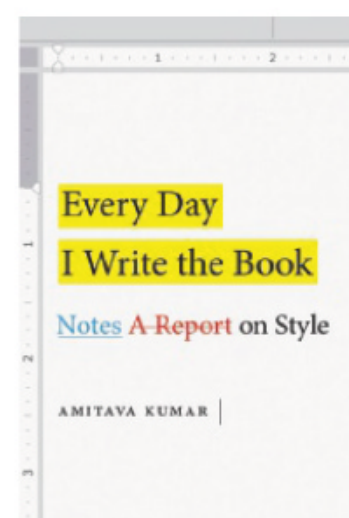
"Every Margaret Randall book or poem is a jewel to be savored, but this text may be the best yet. With her moves through the 1950s expressionist art world in New York through the 1960s Mexican literary scene, the Cuban Revolution looms large and beckons Randall to participate, which eventually brings the scrutiny of Uncle Sam attempting to strip her of her citizenship. Throughout, Randall's early and deep feminism is a guiding light."

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Every Day I Write the Book

Notes on
Style

BY AMITAVA
KUMAR

"*Every Day I Write the Book* compels a cluster of adjectives—eclectic, ruminative, associative, probing, and personal—all of which, taken together, only begin to describe this unique writing sensibility. Turning the pages, we find ourselves riding shotgun through the reading and writing life of a true cosmopolitan intellectual. Kumar instructs and inspires, running on all cylinders."

—Sven Birkerts

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APOCALYPSE NOW

On her new album, Grimes makes pop music for the end of the world

by JULYSSA LOPEZ

Claire Boucher, the Canadian artist and producer better known as Grimes, often makes music so manic, energetic, and lively, it feels animated. Her songs are hyperactive and kinetic—chemical electro-pop with a mind of its own. “Oblivion,” from her 2012 breakthrough album, *Visions*, sounds like a cartoon baby doll springing through the stages of a colorful video game. It’s easy to imagine “Flesh Without Blood,” from 2015’s *Art Angels*, blasting out of a top-down convertible driving across a psychedelic Candy Land. But on her latest album, *Miss Anthropocene*, released this year, Grimes trades brightness for anarchy. Brooding synths

and beats as sparse as empty fields build into songs that are easily her most despondent. There’s a logic to the darkness here: On this record, she’s envisioned music for a planet obliterated by ecological disaster.

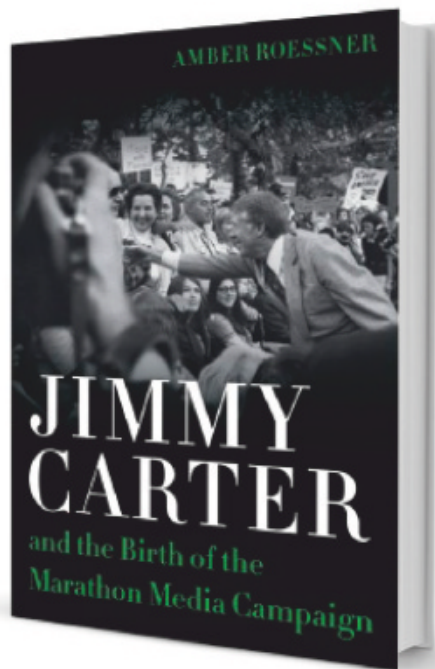
Grimes announced in 2019 that she was planning “a concept album about the anthropomorphic goddess of climate change.” To some, her out-of-the-box thinking and off-the-wall imagination could offer an original way to process the harsh and inevitable realities of global warming. Others were skeptical and even annoyed. The ground had been shifting beneath Grimes and her project for some time. Over the last eight years, she has gone from being an indie auteur to a contentious persona straddling pop stardom.

Outspoken, unpredictable, and contrar-

ian, Grimes has challenged the narrative fans wanted to assign her as a beloved queen of DIY. She’d harbored more mainstream interests and ambitions, and the accusation that she’d sold out frequently and unfairly followed her as she navigated audience expectations and her more pop-driven impulses. The criticism extended to her politics; she’d been blunt about certain progressive causes, often pointing out gender disparities in music and appending “anti-imperialist” to her Twitter bio. But all of that fell under suspicion when she started dating Tesla’s CEO and cofounder, the billionaire Elon Musk. They announced this year they were expecting a child.

Upon its release, *Miss Anthropocene* quickly summoned a vast Internet din of gossip and criticism. As a concept album,

Julyssa Lopez is a contributing writer to The Nation.



Jimmy Carter and the Birth of the Marathon Media Campaign

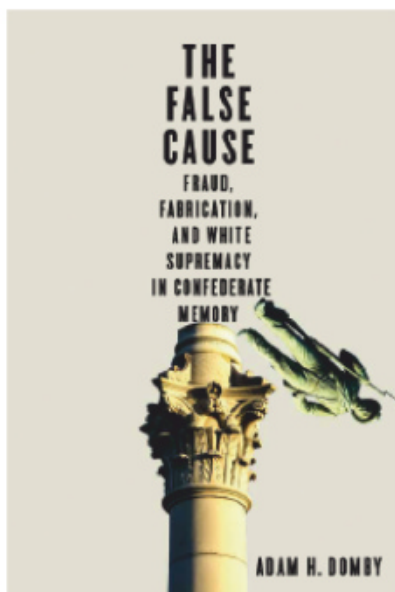
BY AMBER ROESSNER

The 1976 presidential election proved a transformative moment in US history, changing how candidates run for public office and how the news media covers their campaigns. Carter's underdog victory signaled a transition from an older form of party politics focused on issues and platforms to a newer brand of personality politics driven by the manufacture of a political image.

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The False Cause Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory

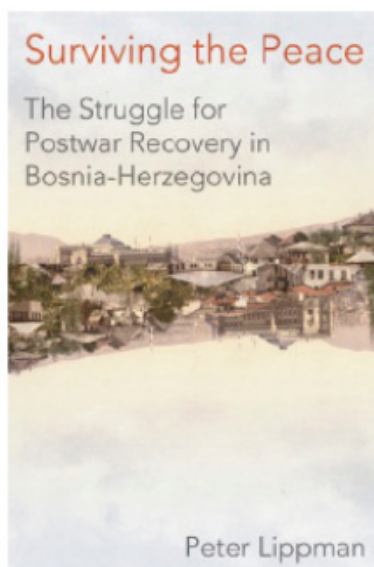
BY ADAM H. DOMBY

A penetrating examination of Lost Cause ideology and the lies on which it is based. Dombey exposes how fabricated narratives about the Civil War that recast a struggle to perpetuate slavery as a heroic defense of the South—as expounded at monument dedications and political rallies—were as crucial to the success of white supremacy in the Jim Crow era as today.

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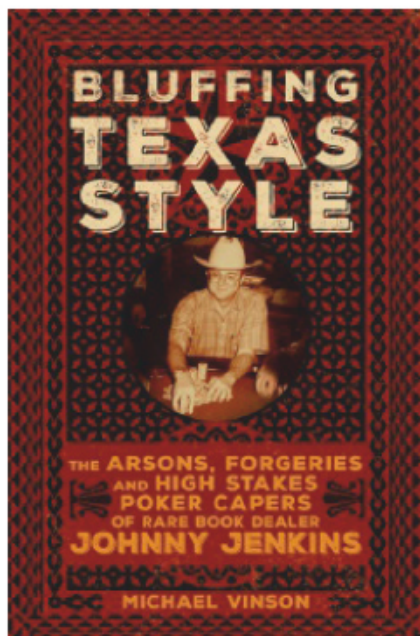
BY PETER LIPPMAN

Unique in its breadth and profoundly humanitarian in its focus, *Surviving the Peace* situates digestible explanations of the region's bewilderingly complex recent history among interviews, conversations, and tableaux from the lives of everyday Bosnians attempting to make sense of what passes for normal in a postwar society.

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY PRESS

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HARDCOVER



Bluffing Texas Style The Arsons, Forgeries, and High Stakes Poker Capers of Rare Book Dealer Johnny Jenkins

BY MICHAEL VINSON

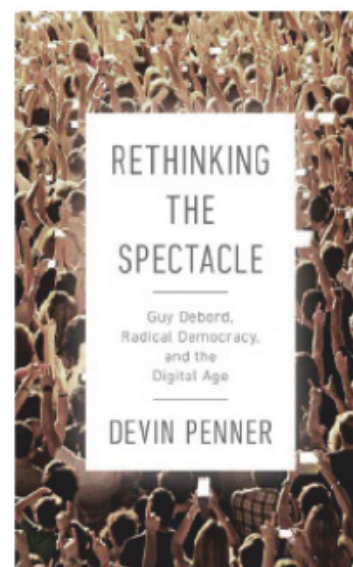
"Johnny Jenkins broke the rules and never got caught. Michael Vinson tracks his life and crimes with the zeal of a Texas Ranger, producing a lively account of a renegade bookseller and a wild period that might otherwise have been forgotten."

—David Streitfeld, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for *The New York Times*

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PAPERBACK



Rethinking the Spectacle

Guy Debord, Radical Democracy, and the Digital Age

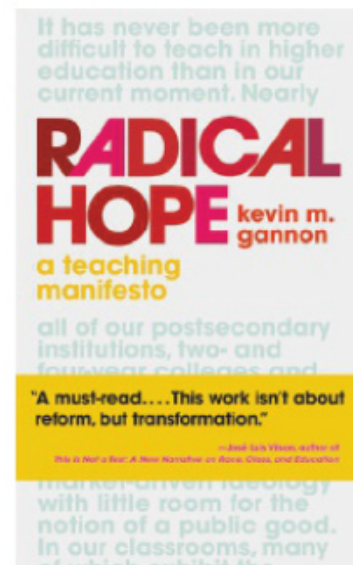
BY DEVIN PENNER

Drawing on radical democratic theory and the ideas of political theorist Guy Debord, *Rethinking the Spectacle* examines the tension between spectacles and political agency in our digital society.

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Radical Hope A Teaching Manifesto

BY KEVIN M. GANNON

"In a time of precariously employed professors, crushing student debt burdens, and cynically manufactured campus outrages, *Radical Hope* is a much-needed practical and principled reminder of the promise and possibility of education for liberation."

—Nikhil Pal Singh, author of *Race and America's Long War* and faculty director, NYU Prison Education Program

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from “For a Daughter/No Address”

Reportless Subjects, to the Quick / Continual addressed—
—Emily Dickinson

if what etches into your eyes leaves a small canyon in its trough
is there the chattering speech
I don't think it's enough to say images seen the still Aleppo pine needles
a tarp billowing at the lower winds are a weather how long could you look

in the foreground at a wet child who isn't you
the two bits of peeling white light she tossed into us feel like a skein
a weight water falling down your back in the bath a salted
silver-edged negative pressing you to the steady light impulse
neither of us will absorb winking in it all the while by its known waves
the state's cargo planes keep from folding into our street

having lost a few peoples running in superfluity the sky behaves itself
over bamboo that grows here wild or bedded with river stones hauled
come to rest their smoothing ends but not the infinitive daughter
gone to run away with water as one of her rhymes

FARID MATUK

it isn't always easy to follow. Grimes's ideas and characters carom off one another like uncontrollable ping-pong balls. But it's an eerily catchy pop record, infectious enough to keep luring listeners back, despite the slightly garbled storytelling and her contradictions as an artist and a celebrity. While some of its solipsistic and absurdist turns are grating and even a little obtuse, they hit on a few unnerving truths about humans in the face of overwhelming disasters. At the core of *Miss Anthropocene*, Grimes captures a self-centeredness and bleakness that we can't always escape in a crisis.

Throughout her career, Grimes has played up her maximalist inclinations with extravagant visuals that explode with movement, color, and cultural references. Her videos are loaded with blood-soaked characters inspired by Marie Antoinette and sci-fi experiments, dancers performing in *Mortal Kombat*-style balaclavas, scenic backdrops that evoke the sets of *Mad Max*, creative treatments that meld cyberpunk with Greek mythology and glitter. The aesthetic is brilliantly paradoxical—heavy artiness and lowbrow camp—and it hints at the endless, eclectic pop culture Rolodex that she carries in her brain. But pain and trauma have often lurked beneath Grimes's bubbly melodies. The opening lines of “Oblivion,” written about her experiences with assault, narrate the post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety that linger after an attack: “And never walk about after dark / It's my point of view / 'Cause someone could break your neck / Coming up behind you, always coming / And you'd never have a clue.”

On *Miss Anthropocene*, she's mastered this balance of harrowing themes and pop-driven touches. The sonic mood is generally foreboding, although the album's hooks and choruses poke above the gloom. “Delete Forever,” a moment of grief driven by spiky acoustic guitars, is an example of when this works best. Grimes's vocals remain crystalline as she sings a mournful chorus that, even in its somberness, has hints of buoyant '90s alt-pop. The song was inspired by the opioid epidemic and the drug overdose of rapper Lil Peep, and its lyrics (“But I did everything, I did everything / More lines on the mirror than a sonnet”) are despairing, especially as she delivers them with chillingly tender emotion. Yet at the end of the chorus, she adds a cheerful yelp of “Woo!” tempering the sentimentality and capturing the broad and multilayered ways she engages with our grim world.

Grimes often turns the lens back on herself. The album's titular character is supposed to be a "space-dwelling demon / Beauty queen who relishes the end of the world," but she also reads as a stand-in for Grimes. "So Heavy I Fell Through the Earth," the atmospheric opener, conjures images of the planet in free fall, although Grimes said in an interview with Apple Music that she wrote the song about her pregnancy. "It's this weird loss of self, or loss of power or something," she explained. "Because it's sort of like a future life in subservience to this new life." The glitchy standout "You'll Miss Me When I'm Not Around" tells the story of a suicidal angel, but lyrics like "If they could see me now, smiling six feet underground / I'll tie my feet to rocks and drown / You'll miss me when I'm not around" hint at her tortured celebrity and her frustrations with the criticism to which she's been subject. "It's sort of about when you're just pissed and everyone's being a jerk to you," she said in an interview.

Grimes's conflating global crises with the public scrutiny of her career strikes a note of shallowness, as does her expressed desire to make "climate change fun." The approach is somewhat defensible if you're familiar with how she mixed camp and darkness in the past, but it's undeniably tone-deaf. As part of the album's publicity cycle, billboards for its release announced "Global warming is good"—purportedly meant as an absurdist demonstration intended to shock people into paying attention. "When I saw it, I was like, 'Oh, fuck no, this is a huge mistake,'" she told *Pitchfork* recently. "Then I was like, 'Wow, this is so scary that I think we should probably put it up.' The goal was to have less advertising and more public art."

The problem is that the billboards are, at the end of the day, advertising for a new album by Grimes, who is now having a child with the 19th-richest person in the world. Certainly, artists should be grappling with the climate crisis in their work, and a celebrity platform, some might argue, should be used to amplify the warnings of rising temperatures and ecosystem collapse. But scientists have pointed out that the climate crisis highlights and exacerbates economic inequality on an already unequal planet. It isn't a great equalizer that will unite us in trag-

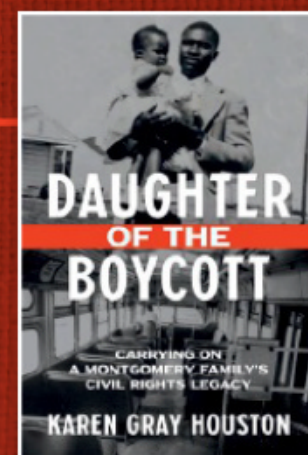


edy; its effects will be felt, first and most drastically, among the most vulnerable and impoverished populations around the world. In most circumstances, bringing Grimes's personal life into a discussion of her art wouldn't seem fair, but the context is impossible to ignore when the entire premise of the album is tied up in questions of global inequality. Perhaps against its own intentions, *Miss Anthropocene* mirrors a larger question of popular artists blurring the lines between activism and entertainment—and of how serious the alarm bells sound when they're ringing from the peaks of celebrity and privilege.

In the midst of a pandemic marked by isolation and angst, *Miss Anthropocene* takes on a different meaning, and even some of Grimes's off-putting artistic choices make sense in this new light. The decision to frame humanity's doom around her experiences in songs like "You'll Miss Me When I'm Not Around" and "So Heavy I Fell Through the Earth" coheres a bit more; it's difficult not to tally the personal costs and filter communal disaster through one's existential despair, although for most people, this probably happens only in private.

But Grimes isn't afraid to reflect our ugliest habits. Though the album was written some time ago, she sharply invokes the rage and cynicism that have become rampant in the past few weeks. The acidic pop song "My Name Is Dark" is an ode to the unavoidable nihilism that rears its head when things appear hopeless ("I don't need to sleep anymore / That's what the drugs are for," she sings between background screeches). "Violence" is a portrait of blind rage, while the staticky synths on the prescient "Before the Fever" feel like a deadly lullaby encouraging humans to submit to their fate.

Miss Anthropocene isn't always coherent, but neither is our moment. On "IDORU," Grimes ends the album by painting an idealistic picture of the future. She weaves in samples of birds chirping and dreamy synths that sound as if they've been piped in from a better place. "As my fingers tremble / This is who I am," she sings earnestly. Grimes hasn't actually clarified who she is, yet you want to believe her. And though the song is unsettling, when it ends, it's good enough to make you hit Repeat. ■



"There are many narratives yet to come out of the galvanizing civil rights movement. Karen Gray Houston's tender and powerful memoir is one such story."

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In Their Own Words

As soon as the stay-at-home order came down in New York, Cinthya Santos Briones started reaching out to her friends and contacts in the Mexican and K'iche' migrant communities in the area. As a documentary photographer, Santos Briones is used to making images herself—but with the coronavirus ravaging the country, she began collecting photos from her networks to illustrate the toll the crisis is taking on their communities.

These pictures come from the third in a series of photographic dispatches The Nation is publishing with Magnum Foundation, focusing on the frontline workers keeping our society functioning during the coronavirus crisis.

We're publishing new installments each Monday at [TheNation.com/Invisible-Frontline](https://www.thenation.com/invisible-frontline)



KIMBERLY/BROOKLYN

Cramped Quarters

Cinthya: Hello, Kimberly! How is your life at this moment of the coronavirus?

Kimberly: Hi, Cinthya, right now it's a little difficult, with the kids at home, everyone already is at home. There is no space for everyone to be in their own space. My family and I live in a room with five people, it is difficult for us not to fight. Each thing makes us angry. Of course we have our moments that we laugh, but with so much being together, at times we feel we will suffocate. You already get bored of being the same every day. Now if you go out, you already have to use gloves and a mask.

MYRNA/MANHATTAN

Safety First

Cinthya: Hi, Myrna, how have you been?

Myrna Lazcano: Good, Michelle plays a lot during the pandemic. In order for my daughter not to get bored from the confinement, Michelle and I have made clothes for her dolls. She wanted to make a face mask for her Barbie.

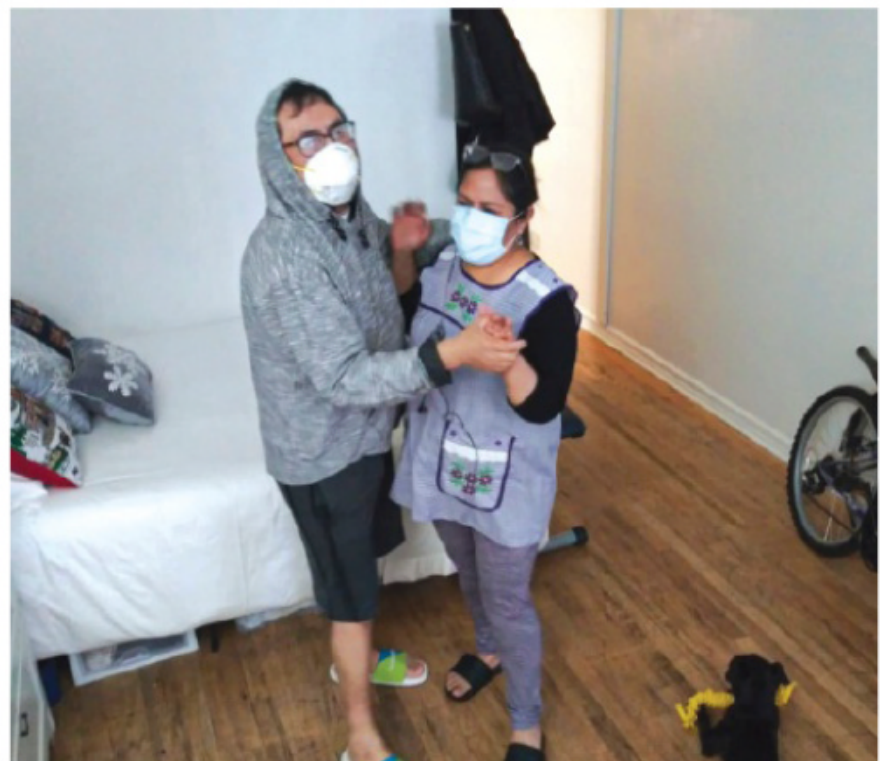


JESÚS/BROOKLYN

Out of Work

Cinthya: How are you, Jesús? How have you been with the coronavirus?

Jesús Bravo: Hi, Cinthya, for the moment I am well, resting at home, since due to the situation we are experiencing, I have not been able to work. The job where I was working in construction is closed until further notice, but hopefully this situation will be resolved soon, since financially it is affecting me.



MYRNA/MANHATTAN

Lockdown

Cinthya: Hi, what are you doing?

Myrna: Miguel and I are dancing to bolero songs by Mexican singer Javier Solís in the living room.



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